

Thomson, Andrew

Lectures, expository and practical, on select portions of scripture

Bd.: 1

Edinburgh 1816

Exeg. 1091 t-1

urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10412998-3

Esseg. 1091 $\pm$

1

<36635609120018

<36635609120018

Bayer. Staatsbibliothek

LECTURES,
EXPOSITORY AND PRACTICAL,
ON
SELECT PORTIONS
OF
SCRIPTURE.

BY THE
REV. ANDREW THOMSON, A. M.
MINISTER OF ST GEORGE'S, EDINBURGH.

VOL. I.

*Thomson
Lectures
of Scripture*

EDINBURGH:

PRINTED FOR WILLIAM BLACKWOOD, EDINBURGH; AND
T. CADELL AND W. DAVIES, STRAND, LONDON.

1816.

992

LECTURES

EXPOSITORY AND PRACTICAL

SELECT PORTIONS

SCRIPTURE

Bayerische
Staatsbibliothek
MÜNCHEN

EDINBURGH:

PRINTED FOR WILLIAM BLACKWOOD, EDINBURGH; AND
T. GADSDEN AND W. DAVIES, STATIONERS, LONDON.

1810

CONTENTS

OF

VOLUME FIRST.

	<i>Page.</i>
LECTURE I.	
Matt. v. 13—16.	1
LECTURE II.	
Luke xiii. 1—9.	24
LECTURE III.	
Matt. vi. 25—34.	45
LECTURE IV.	
Luke ix. 51—56.	68
LECTURE V.	
John xii. 44—50.	94
LECTURE VI.	
Luke vii. 18—23.	117
LECTURE VII.	
Luke vii. 24—35.	142
LECTURE VIII.	
Luke vii. 36—50.	167
LECTURE IX.	
Matt. 7. 1—11.	193
LECTURE X.	
Matt. vii. 12—20.	217
LECTURE XI.	
Acts iii. 12—16.	244
LECTURE XII.	
Acts iii. 17—21.	267
LECTURE XIII.	
Acts iii. 22—26.	292

CONTENTS

of

VOLUME FIRST.

Page	
1	Lecture I. Matt. v. 13-16
24	Lecture II. Luke xiii. 1-9
43	Lecture III. Matt. vi. 23-34
68	Lecture IV. Luke ix. 51-58
94	Lecture V. John xii. 44-50
117	Lecture VI. Luke vii. 18-23
142	Lecture VII. Luke vii. 24-35
167	Lecture VIII. Luke vii. 36-50
193	Lecture IX. Matt. x. 1-11
217	Lecture X. Matt. vii. 12-20
244	Lecture XI. Acts iii. 19-16
267	Lecture XII. Acts iii. 17-26
292	Lecture XIII. Acts iii. 27-29

LECTURE I.

MATT. V. 13—16.

13. *Ye are the salt of the earth : but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men.—14. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.—15. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.—16. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

IN the course of his instructions, our Saviour employed a great deal of figurative language. He borrowed illustrations of his doctrine and his sentiment from such natural facts as were familiar to the recollection of his hearers, and sometimes from the very objects, and scenes, - and changes, that were passing before their eyes.

This mode of inculcating religious and moral truth was common in the East, and has some peculiar advantages. It fixes the attention; it interests the fancy and the feelings; it assists the power of comprehension; it enables the memory to retain impressions which it would otherwise be apt to lose; and it forms associations in the mind, that are equally lively, pleasing, and useful.

The figures made use of by our Saviour are frequently not only strictly appropriate, and happily introduced, but also extremely beautiful and touching. His great object, however, was, not to please a refined or fastidious taste, but to inform the judgment and affect the hearts of mankind in general. And, therefore, we observe him occasionally neglecting those rules by which men of regular system and of polished literature are guided in the construction and application of their figures, but at the same time never losing sight of what is requisite for producing the effect which he has in view. Even when there are apparently greater

imperfections of this nature than might have been expected, these may always be ascribed to particular circumstances in the condition of his hearers, or in the occasion on which he spoke, though it has not been deemed expedient or necessary to record them.

The figures which he employs in the passage before us, and in other parts of his Sermon on the Mount, are remarkable for their aptitude to explain and to enforce the ideas which he means to convey, and the lessons which he designs to teach. He is representing to his disciples the situation in which they are placed, as possessing that character, and inculcating upon them the duties which it implies. He is reminding them of the principles which they hold, and of the professions which they make, and of the effects which their conduct will produce upon the world, according as it shall correspond with these or contradict them. And in order to impress his instructions more distinctly and more forcibly on their minds, he makes use of some striking metaphors. He calls them "the salt of the

earth,"—" the light of the world,"—" a city that is set on an hill." All these may be considered as pointing to the same great object, and illustrating the same great maxims. Yet each of them may also be regarded as having a separate import, and as originally intended to convey a separate lesson. And it is in this light we are to view them in our exposition of the passage.

"Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."

The earth or the world is in a state of corruption. It is corrupt both with respect to doctrine, and with respect to practice. Before men are favoured with the Gospel dispensation, how false and absurd are their notions even of the fundamental principles of religion! And how unholy is their moral conduct in its leading features and most essential qualities! To this degenerate character, there is in human nature a strong

and decided tendency. The tendency gathers strength from exercise and from habit. And unless it be checked by some powerful counteracting cause, it must at length exhibit the mass of society in a deplorable state of degradation and depravity. Such, in fact, is the aspect which mankind have presented wherever they have been left to the absolute influence of their own evil and perverted inclinations. They constitute a "world that lieth in wickedness."

Now, Christians are the salt of the earth, inasmuch as they, in some measure prevent, and, in some measure cure, this spiritual corruption. The religion which they have adopted is of such a nature—it is so purifying and so efficacious—that it never fails, where its power has a proper opportunity of acting, to produce these effects in a greater or less degree. Operating by means of the conversation and the conduct—the habitual temper and the habitual manners of those who have embraced it in the love of it,—it checks the progress of error and vice,—removes the impurities

which were growing for want of an adequate corrective,—subdues and bears down those sinful propensities which were just ready to come into action,—and insinuates so much truth into the minds, and so much decency into the characters of the wicked, as to preserve them, at least, from that total degeneracy into which they were rapidly sinking. Nay, it sometimes goes a great deal farther than this—effectuating not merely a partial alteration, but an entire change in the heart and the life, converting sinners to the belief, the love, and the obedience of “the truth as it is in Jesus” Christ, and cherishing in them the pious sentiments and the holy principles which it has inspired.

And all this is, from the nature of the figure here employed, supposed to be accomplished, not in the way of formal and systematic instruction, but by that indirect influence which a truly religious and holy deportment exercises over all who come within its reach. In such a deportment, there is a charm which steals, unperceived,

into the admiration of those by whom it is daily observed. There is a virtue that goes out of it, which passes insensibly into the hearts of many whose attention has never been called to it, and, by the blessing of God, engages their affections, and reforms their behaviour, almost before they are aware of its existence. This secret but powerful energy, is communicated from individual to individual, till there is scarcely one who has not experienced, in some degree, its transforming or correcting effect. The tone of public morals is gradually raised to a higher pitch. The character of society comes to present a purer and more dignified aspect. And if such a complete and permanent amelioration does not take place, as its importance renders desirable, great numbers at least, feeling the impression, and breathing the spirit of that Christian excellence which is continually before them, and around them, are brought at length to respect, to esteem, to cultivate, and to assist in diffusing, those graces from

which their minds were formerly most abhorrent.

These, my friends, are the important and blessed effects to be produced in the world by your Christian spirit, life, and conversation. Be careful, then, to keep these effects steadily in view, and to act in such a manner as shall be most likely to promote them in their utmost extent. Beware of conformity to the world; of giving into its follies, or indulging in its vices; of cherishing that temper, and of committing those actions which may encourage sinners in their evil ways; and of thus increasing that moral corruption which it should be the uniform tendency of your character to lessen or remove. Such conduct would be disgraceful to yourselves, who have it so much in your power to advance the spiritual interests of your brethren: it would be injurious to the honour and influence of that religion of which you should be the guardian and support; and it would be most pernicious to the welfare of immortal souls, whom it must either seduce from the

right path, or confirm in their impenitence and unbelief. “If the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted. It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.” If you lose that spirit of grace, and that character of holiness, which essentially belong to you as true Christians, your usefulness is gone; by no other means is it possible for you to act as the salt of the earth: you become worthless and despicable; and whatever be your station, your talents, or your attainments in other respects, in this the most important of all, you are utterly destitute of that which alone can give value to your moral conduct in the sight of him who has bestowed upon you your Christian privileges, assigned you your social duties, and will at length require of you an account of your services in the cause of truth and godliness. If you have been instrumental in encouraging the growth of impiety and wickedness—if, indeed, you have not been instrumental in your own sphere, and according to your

own opportunities, in advancing the progress of vital religion, you shall be cast out—not from the friendship of men, but from the favour and presence of God—and you shall be, not trodden under foot of creatures like yourselves, but utterly crushed and destroyed under the wrath of that Almighty Being, whose holy will you have disobeyed, and whose merciful purpose you have been labouring to frustrate.

But while I would warn you against such a conduct as must positively and directly promote the corruption which it should be your endeavour to counteract, I would also remind you of another error which may partly produce the same evil, and into which some are apt to fall. It is true you must not be conformed to the world, but neither must you be altogether separated from it. You must not stand aloof from the society of those whom it is your duty, and should be your intention and desire, to benefit. Salt, to which you are here compared, cannot prevent the putrefaction of any substance unless it be brought

into contact with that substance, and intimately intermingled with it. So neither can you do good to mankind in the way of preventing or remedying their corruption, unless you associate with them,—unless they not only observe at a distance, but feel closely, the influence of your good conversation,—unless in the duties, the business, and even the innocent relaxations of life, you communicate, in cautious but friendly intercourse, that divine sentiment which reigns in every part of your conduct. You must so converse and live with them, indeed, as to imbibe none of their evil while you are imparting to them largely of your good. But still it is necessary that you *do* converse and live with them, and that you do so on such terms and in such a manner as to give them the near and constant opportunity of drawing from your language, from your actions, from your very spirit, those lessons of wisdom, and those sentiments of purity, by which their character is to be restored, exalted, and refined.

“Ye are the light of the world.”—“Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel; but on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

Christians are the light of the world. This is one of the great characters which Christ assumed to himself, and which every one of his real disciples sustains in consequence of his union with him, and in imitation of his example. The world in its natural state is spiritually dark: ignorant of those truths respecting God, a Saviour, a future state, and preparation for it, with which it is essential to its well being, to be intimately acquainted; and of course walking in those evil and comfortless ways which terminate in destruction. But Christ was sent as a prophet, to reveal to mankind all that it is necessary for them to know, and all that it is necessary for them to practise. And those to whom this revelation has been made—those who have

been taught by the word and spirit of Christ—those who possess the religious and moral information which he came to impart—are to be considered, though in a secondary and subordinate way, as holding the same great and important office. It is through them, in a great measure at least, that the divine will concerning human faith and obedience, is to be communicated to such as are still strangers to it—to be applied to their understanding, recommended to their love, and enforced upon their practice. With them is deposited that system of truth, and purity, and comfort, which is equally designed and calculated to improve the present condition, and secure the everlasting happiness of our fallen race. And if they walk worthy of this distinguished privilege—if they entertain just ideas of the gift that has been conferred upon them, of its diffusive nature and universal importance—and if they employ it in the way and for the purposes which piety, and zeal, and benevolence would dictate—they will be the light of the world,

not merely in point of obligation, but in point of fact—causing knowledge to run to and fro through the earth, and making the sun of righteousness to shine upon every people, and upon every land, with healing and with gladness in his beams.

Yes, my fellow Christians, this is one part—and a most honourable and important part it is—of that vocation to which you are called as the disciples of Jesus. On you, along with all who are “light in the Lord,” depend the instruction of mankind in that which alone can make them wise unto salvation. You have it in your power to convey to them all the rich and precious blessings of which light is an emblem—knowledge the most excellent and sublime—holiness that adorns the life and ennobles the heart—perfect security from the dangers of sin—and a joy that is pure, exalted, and everlasting. And surely, my friends, being aware of the value of these blessings, and having felt it in your own experience, you must be anxious to impart them to the multitudes that are among you, and to the

myriads that are around you, who are still involved in the grossest darkness. O how delightful to be instrumental in chasing away the shadows that rest thick and deep on the regions of superstition, idolatry, and error—to illuminate the path of “the ignorant, and of them that are out of the way”—to open the eyes of those who had been “blinded by the god of this world,” and pour upon them a flood of heavenly light—to put the torch of revelation into their hands, that they “walk” without fear “through the dark valley of death”—and to conduct them at length into the glories of an unclouded and eternal day! Be yours, my friends, the ardent wish, the noble design, the god-like endeavour, to enlighten, to reform, and to save a benighted world!

For accomplishing this benevolent purpose, you must be active—you must make diligent and persevering efforts—it must be your constant study to give, as you have received, of that light of which you are not only recipients for your own advantage, but also depositories for the benefit of

others. When “men light a candle, they do not put it under a bushel”—that would be to defeat the end for which it is lighted—but they put it “in a candlestick, that it may give light to all that are in the house.” In like manner, if you keep that knowledge of the grace and will of God, which you have received from Christ, locked up in your own breast, you frustrate one important purpose for which it has been given to you. That it may answer all the ends for which it has been bestowed, and which it is calculated to subserve, you must employ every means with which you are provided for spreading it as extensively as possible—imparting it to those who are within the sphere of your more immediate influence, and imparting it to those also whom it will require more laborious exertions to reach, but who stand equally in need of it; for whom it is equally intended by its gracious Author, and whom it is equally your duty to instruct in every practicable way.

There is one way of letting your light shine, to which our Saviour particularly re-

fers, and which it is particularly incumbent on you to observe—it is by “*walking* as children of the light and of the day.” The religious knowledge which you have acquired must be reduced to practice—it must be exhibited in your “good works.” Unless your light guide your feet in the path of righteousness, “the light that is in you is but as darkness.” It does no good to yourselves, and it can scarcely be profitable to others. If men see you leading ungodly and licentious lives, they will be apt to turn a deaf ear to your counsels, however just and useful in themselves, and to form unfavourable opinions of the truth and excellence of a system, which, however warmly you recommend it to *them*, has no good effect on your own conduct. But if, on the other hand, they see it embodied into your character,—if they see it “teaching you to deny ungodliness and worldly affections, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly”—if they see it shining forth in all the beauties of holiness and piety, of charity and virtue—they feel

themselves constrained to treat it with respect and esteem; they are led to attend to its nature and its evidences with something more than mere impartiality; and they may be brought by degrees to embrace, to love, and to obey it—to the glory of that God in whose mercy it has originated, and by whose grace it has been rendered effectual. Let your light shine, then, through the medium of *good works*. And let it so shine through that medium, that its object may be most certainly and most extensively attained. Let it shine clear and splendid;—be bold, zealous, and active, in the performance of duty. Let it shine full and free from dark spots, or partial obscurities;—labour to stand “perfect and complete in *all* the will of God.” Let it shine constantly—“more and more unto the perfect day;”—persevere in the ways of holiness, and be “always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Thus “shining as lights in the world,” you shall not only save your own souls, but be the means of saving the souls of many—you shall be the

honoured instruments of bringing glory to God and happiness to men.

“A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.”

Christians are like a city set on a hill. This figure conveys a very important lesson. It teaches us to recollect the eminence of our situation among men, that we may do nothing unworthy of it. We are exalted to a high place by the profession of Christianity; a place of honour and of distinction. And it becomes us to have a corresponding deportment; never to cherish any affection that is grovelling, nor to descend to any action that is mean and base; but to maintain that elevation and dignity of character which are suitable to the station that we hold; to cultivate those aspiring views, to be engaged in those divine exercises, to be nourishing those exalted hopes, which shall form a habitual preparation for obeying the summons of departure, and taking our flight to heaven.

But Christians live not for themselves alone—they live for the benefit of others,—and the benefit which others may derive from them will depend on the conduct and example that they exhibit. They cannot be hid: they are seen of all—they are narrowly watched—whatever they do is made the subject of notice and animadversion among thousands, of whose observation they are not aware, and whom they are ready to regard as completely beyond the reach of their influence. If they do good, its effect in reforming, guiding, or encouraging, must consequently be felt more forcibly and more widely. And if they do evil, it is eagerly laid hold of by the enemies of the Gospel, to “blaspheme that worthy name by which they are called,” to encourage themselves in sin, and to lay a stumbling block in the way of others.

Let us never for a moment, then, forget the place which as Christians we occupy in the world, and the effects which our conduct may produce on the principles and character of mankind. And under this im-

pression let us be watchful and circumspect in every part of our behaviour—let us renounce those pursuits or pleasures, of our indulgence in which the wicked might take advantage to injure the cause of practical religion; let us be careful to “abstain from the very appearance of evil;” and let us be scrupulously attentive to the discharge of every duty which our several relations may require of us, and to the manifestation of that character which shall prove the Gospel to be at once a doctrine of grace, and “a doctrine according to godliness.”

I shall conclude with observing, that though the language of the passage on which we have been commenting, may have a special reference to the public teachers and ministers of religion, yet, from the very nature of the subject, it must be understood as referring to all Christians, and as pointing out *your* obligations as well as ours. Ministers of religion, indeed, must consider themselves as more particularly

the salt of the earth—the light of the world—a city set upon a hill—and whatever obligations these metaphors imply, must be viewed as more emphatically resting upon *them*. But there is no real Christian, however mean his station, however limited his talents, however circumscribed the sphere of his activity, who has it not in his power to retard or to hasten the progress of religion—to injure or to support the interests of piety and virtue. The poorest and most inefficient member of the church can lift up his testimony against profaneness and vice; or give counsel to an ignorant and erring brother; or set a good example before his family, his friends, and his companions; or contribute his mite to the propagation of scriptural truth. And, on the other hand, by inconsistent and immoral conduct, he cannot fail, among some of those about him, to bring reproach upon the name of Christ, and to diminish the efficacy of that religion, the belief and obedience of which are essential to the happiness of every individual.

Let no Christian, therefore, persuade himself, that he is exempt from the duties which our Saviour is here inculcating on his disciples—for he speaks not to the twelve only, but to the multitude. But let all of us, in our different circumstances, and according to our several abilities, do what we can for the glory of God, for the honour of the Redeemer's kingdom, for the spiritual and immortal welfare of our brethren;—satisfied that when we keep this object constantly in view, and pursue it with steadiness and zeal, then, and only then, are we acting up to the spirit and example of our divine Master, and walking worthy of the blessings we enjoy, and the hopes we entertain. Amen.

LECTURE II.

LUKE xiii. 1—9.

1. *There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.—2. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things?—3. I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.—4. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?—5. I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.—6. He spake also this parable: A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.—7. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?—8. And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it:—9. And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.*

OF the tragical events mentioned in the first and fourth verses, we have no farther information than what is here presented to us. Nor can it be either useful or expedient to tax our ingenuity, and occupy our

time, in forming conjectures respecting that which, after all, might contribute neither to our wisdom nor to our virtue. It is enough that as much is told as to shew us the meaning, and satisfy us of the propriety, of our Saviour's instruction ; and here we have all that is necessary to answer that important purpose.

The facts were simply these : That there were certain Galileans, whom Pilate, for reasons which are not stated, had slain while they were offering up their sacrifices at a public feast ; and that the tower of Siloam had fallen, and buried eighteen persons under its ruins.

We are not informed of the object which those had in view who introduced the story of the Galileans ; but from the strain of Christ's reply, it is probable that they introduced it for the purpose of insinuating a severe reflection against the sufferers. The Jews entertained a great contempt and dislike for the Galileans, and narrated, with pleasure, any circumstances that tended to justify these unfavourable sentiments.

They pointed out to Jesus the fate which had befallen a considerable portion of that people at Jerusalem, as a proof that they deserved to be hated and despised: For unless they had been singularly wicked, (such seems to have been their mode of reasoning,) the Almighty would not have allowed them to be subjected to such an awful calamity;—he would not have permitted them to be slain by a Roman governor;—and would not have suffered his temple and his worship to be polluted with their blood.

Our Saviour distinctly contradicts this view of the subject. The argument was erroneous. The conclusion was false. It was not true that those only who experienced extraordinary judgments were to be considered as heinous transgressors. In such cases, God acted with a sovereignty which forbade us to judge of his conduct, or of the relative demerits of those whom it affected, according to our imperfect conceptions of the divine government. Many of their countrymen were as guilty in his sight as the unhappy Galileans who were

slaughtered by Pilate; but it pleased the wise and righteous Disposer of all things, that these should suffer while the others escaped. And, so far from obnoxiousness to the divine displeasure being confined to the few Galileans that perished, our Saviour asserts it to belong even to the very persons who were now moralizing, with so much self-complacency and Pharisaical pride, on the character of an unjustly despised race, and warns them, in plain and emphatic language, that if they persevered in their wicked ways, they themselves should sooner or later be overtaken by the judgments of heaven.

Christ also alludes to another fact which had recently happened, in order to demonstrate the groundlessness of that opinion which he combated. The tower of Siloam had fallen and destroyed eighteen of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. This seemed to be more immediately a visitation of Providence than the other, as there was here no interference at all of human agency. And yet a portion of that highly favoured

and self-righteous people, the Jews, were as suddenly and unexpectedly overwhelmed with destruction, as were the condemned Galileans whom Pilate so cruelly murdered at their devotions. And, besides, it was a notorious fact, that there were multitudes in Jerusalem as guilty as any of the eighteen who had been cut off in the midst of their business and enjoyments. These awful catastrophes, therefore, afforded no proof, either in the one case or in the other, that those who were involved in them surpassed their fellow-men in the number and aggravations of their sins. On the contrary, it became every one, even those who appeared to be most innocent, to confess that they also were transgressors of the divine law—to be humbled under a sense of their own unworthiness—and to exercise a godly repentance, lest they should finally fall into condemnation.

1. Let us beware of drawing rash or severe inferences respecting the character of others, from the calamities which overtake them.

No doubt God is the moral governor of the world—he hates sin and loves holiness—and, in the general course and ultimate issue of his Providence, he will punish those who commit the one, and reward those who cultivate the other. But then we are to remember that the present is a mixed state; and that, on many occasions, and in many respects, there is “one event to the righteous and to the wicked,”—to “them that fear God, and to them that fear him not.” The former are sometimes in deep adversity, while the latter are prospering in all their ways; and sometimes both are involved in one common fate. In all this, there is doubtless a combination of goodness and wisdom, though we may not be able in every instance to trace and understand it. It is sufficient for us to recognise the fact; and while we adore the unsearchable ways and judgments of Him who ruleth over all, to learn this practical lesson, that when we do decide on the character of our brethren, it should rather be from what they do, than from what they

suffer; and to rest in the assurance, that when God "judges the world," he will do it "in righteousness," and "give to every man according to his works." In that day, some of those whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices, and some of those on whom the tower of Siloam fell, may be numbered among the sons of God and the heirs of glory; while many whom no such awful dispensation visited, but who lived to old age, and expired in tranquillity, shall be commanded to "depart into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

2. Again, let us always be more anxious to judge ourselves than to judge others.

Our Saviour's informers were so much occupied with estimating the demerit of the Galileans, that they forgot to think about their own; and might have flattered themselves with the opinion that they were extremely good, because they had found the Galileans extremely wicked, had not Christ broken the delusion, by reminding

them strongly, that they also were sinners. Of what consequence is it to us, that the thousands that surround us are demonstrated to be sinners above all others? The demonstration is likely, from the spirit with which we sought it, and the feelings with which we received it, to foster an uncharitable temper, and an overweening self-conceit: it cannot surely contribute anything to our comfort, or much to our edification; and it certainly tends to hide from us our own faults, and to underrate our own demerit. But, undoubtedly, the very facts which it tends to conceal, it is of most importance for us to know. Till we are acquainted with ourselves, we are ignorant of what should be to us the most interesting of all subjects. And the deeper our guilt is, the more necessary is it for us to be aware of it in all its turpitude and extent, that we may be the more anxious and eager to be delivered from its burden. If we can once bring ourselves to look narrowly into our heart and character, to estimate our spiritual state impartially, and to condemn

without reserve whatever we discover to be sinful and unworthy, we have laid a foundation for personal improvement, and are better prepared for thinking favourably of our fellow-men. This is to act the wise and useful part—just and even severe towards ourselves, but charitable and indulgent towards others.

3. Once more, let us listen to the solemn warning delivered by our Saviour to the impenitent, and let every one of us profit by the warning he has given.

We have all sinned against God; and, in consequence of that, we are all liable to condemnation. This is the universal fact, recorded in Scripture, and testified by our consciences. There is not an individual amongst us, whatever he may think of himself, or whatever he may be thought of by the world, who can, by any pretext, or by any apology, repel the charge of guilt, or deny the obligations to punishment, which it infers. But we are not left hopelessly to the destruction we have merited. God

is “rich in mercy,” and “plenteous in redemption.” He has sent his Son to make atonement for our sins. And, in virtue of that atonement, there is forgiveness for the penitent : so that if “the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and return unto the Lord, he will have mercy on him, and will abundantly pardon him.” Yes, my friends, so great is the compassion of God, that he “has no pleasure in the death of the wicked,” but is rather willing that they should turn unto him and live. And so mighty is the redeeming power of Christ, that he is “able to save to the very uttermost all who come unto God through him.” But in the whole dispensation of the Gospel, nothing is more certain than this, that unless we exercise genuine repentance, the compassion of God, and the power of Christ, will not save us—we “shall die in our sins.” In the passage before us, Christ himself—the messenger of grace to fallen men—says expressly, and says strongly, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” This

address, perhaps, had a peculiar reference to the circumstances of those to whom it was originally spoken, and to the extraordinary judgments with which the obstinacy of the Jews was punished. But from the very nature of the thing, it must be considered as applicable, and as directed to all who have sinned and incurred the penalty of the law, as requiring of every one of us that we turn from sin unto God, and as denouncing, if not the temporal calamities that were inflicted on the Jews, the wrath of offended Omnipotence in a future and eternal world, against those who will not repent. Let us then, my friends, be persuaded to turn from sin unto God—satisfied that when we do so, we go from our worst enemy to our best friend, and that we shall not only escape “the wrath to come,” but obtain “everlasting life.”

Our Saviour next illustrates and enforces the important lesson which he had given respecting the necessity of repentance, by a striking and appropriate parable. This parable, in its primary signification, applies

to the Jews. It resembles, in its leading features, the parable of the vineyard which is found in the fifth chapter of Isaiah, and which inculcates the same truths, and proclaims the same warnings. It represents the Jews as enjoying peculiar advantages. They did not, however, maintain a corresponding conduct. Their character was quite unworthy of their privileges. This provoked the displeasure of Jehovah, who threatened to punish them for it. But mercy interposed and saved them. A lengthened opportunity was afforded, and additional means of grace were provided:—the dispensation of the Gospel was given—with a promise on the one hand, that if they repented, and believed, and obeyed, they would be accepted and saved—and with a threatening on the other, that if they persevered in their rebellion and disobedience, their doom would be dreadful, certain, and irrevocable. We know the result. Such instructive parables as this should have awakened them to a sense of their danger and their duty, and produced

the most salutary effects on their religious principles and moral deportment. But, alas ! they would not hearken unto Christ. " They set at nought all his counsel, and would have none of his reproof." Their understandings were so blinded by prejudice, that they could not see the light which he poured upon them. Their hearts were so hardened with sin, that they were insensible to his most pathetic expostulations. They continued to walk in their own evil ways, notwithstanding the alarms which he so frequently sounded in their ears. And, at length, having filled up the measure of their iniquity, they were overwhelmed in sudden and utter destruction. Let us avoid their fate, by avoiding their conduct. The parable is full of instruction to us, as it was to them. And if we neglect to apply it to ourselves, and to profit by the application, the more heinous will be our guilt, and the more heavy our punishment.

We have been long as fig-trees planted in the vineyard of the Lord. We have

been members of his visible church. We have been favoured with numerous and important privileges. We have had the word of God to instruct us in all that it was necessary for us to believe and to do. We have had his ordinances to nourish and refresh our souls, and to animate us in the path of duty. We have had all the means that have been appointed, and all the opportunities that could be desired, for promoting our improvement in knowledge, and faith, and holiness. And it may well be asked, if more *could* have been done than what *has* been done for our spiritual welfare.

Now the Lord of the vineyard—God from whom we have received all those advantages—has come and sought fruit upon us; he has come to ascertain what improvement we have made; and what has he found? On some of us we trust that he has found those “fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God.” On many he has found little in proportion to what might justly

have been expected, from the favourable soil in which they were placed, and from the patient and attentive culture that had been bestowed. And, alas ! it is to be feared, that there are not a few who are absolutely barren—as unproductive of what is good and acceptable, as if they had still been left in the bleak and sterile wilderness. They have had leaves—the symptom and the profession of spiritual soundness ; they have even had blossoms—the promises and the resolutions of substantial excellence :—but what are all these to the lord of the vineyard, who comes seeking fruit—demanding what he has a right to expect, the unreserved devotedness of their hearts and lives ?

Observe, now, the merited fate of those who are thus unfruitful in the work of the Lord. “ Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none ; cut it down ; why cumbereth it the ground ? ” Professing Christians, who have merely “ a name to live while they are dead,” are here

spoken of as cumberers of the ground—not merely useless, but troublesome and pernicious members of the church—who occupy places which should be assigned to the worthy—whose very appearance is offensive to the eye, and who infect with their own corrupt qualities all who are brought within the sphere of their influence. Their unworthiness, too, is increased by the forbearance that has been exercised towards them, by the patience with which their virtues have been long waited for, and by the disappointments with which this indulgence has been uniformly requited. Year after year, divine mercy has spared them ; but year after year has found them despising and abusing the mercy which should have led them to repentance. And therefore, God, in his just displeasure against them for their ingratitude and disobedience, pronounces the doom which they have merited. Let the barren fig-tree be “ cut down,” that it may be cast into the fire and burned. God commissions his Son—here spoken of as the dresser of

the vineyard—to whom he “has committed all judgment,” to punish and destroy those wicked men who have “received his grace in vain,” and trampled upon his law. And surely had that commission been executed, they must long ere now have been lamenting their folly and perverseness in the regions of despair.

And why has not the award of divine justice been carried into effect? Why are these wicked men not destroyed? Why are they still in the land of the living, and in the place of hope? Not because they have felt contrition, and supplicated a respite: for, alas! the longer they have been spared, the more worthless and the more hardened have they become. No: it is because God is long-suffering and abundant in goodness—and because Jesus, who is mediator as well as judge, intercedes in their behalf. “The dresser of the vineyard answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it.” Thus you see, my friends, that the Saviour pleads for you, and God

hearkens to the plea. Another year—another month—another day—for you know not when you shall be called to give in your account—another period of time is added ; offers of mercy are still made ; the means of salvation are still continued ; and more affecting and more urgent motives than ever are pressed upon your conscience, to rouse you to serious concern about your souls, and unwearied activity in the ways of religion. You have no excuse for carelessness and sloth : God has laid graciously and liberally to your hand ; and if you perish, your blood will be upon your own heads.

But what is to be the consequence of all this with respect to your *conduct*? What are you to do in this your accepted time—in this the day of your merciful visitation? Is the Saviour's intercession to be in vain? Is the forbearance of God to make no impression on your hearts? Is our warning to be treated as if it had not been given? That remains with *yourselves* to determine. What you ought to do is too obvi-

ous to be mistaken. Every consideration of wisdom, of duty, of gratitude, and of interest, calls you from sin unto holiness—from Satan unto God—from inactivity to diligence in the work which is given you to do. And the unfruitfulness of your past life should make you “give all diligence” that you may crowd into what remains of it as much as possible of “the work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope.” Up, then, and be doing. Lose not a moment: every passing moment is precious—for it embraces a portion of your preparation for eternity. To improve it aright, is to labour for salvation. To delay, may ruin you, and that for ever.

—And what is to be the ultimate consequence with respect to your *condition*? “If it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that, thou shalt cut it down.” How rich in mercy is our God! You have been long as cumberers of the ground: unworthy of being allowed to remain in his vineyard;—deserving to be extirpated and destroyed.

And yet, notwithstanding all this, he is even now ready to save you with an everlasting salvation, for the sake of his beloved Son, if you will “bring forth the fruits that are meet for repentance.” Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ—surrender yourselves to God—go into the way of his commandments; and at length all your past iniquities shall be forgiven, you shall be accepted of him whom you have so much offended, and, transplanted from the wilderness of this world to the paradise above, your fruit shall ripen into immortality.

But while God is rich in mercy, he is also awful in justice and in judgment. The holiness of his character, and the honour of his government, require him to punish, with everlasting destruction, the rebellious and impenitent. Yes, brethren, if you are rebellious and impenitent, “the wrath of God” will fall upon you and “abide upon you.” He has told you this in his word, with all the solemnity, and with all the earnestness, which become the subject. And though you may escape his righteous dis-

pleasure in this world, it will overtake you and overwhelm you in the world that is to come. Under the impression of this momentous truth—of this alarming prospect, let me conjure you to repent without delay, to devote what yet remains of your existence here to the service of your God and Redeemer, and thus to be waiting for the second coming of the Son of Man. Amen.

LECTURE III.

MATT. vi. 25—34.

25. *Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?—*26. *Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?—*27. *Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?—*28. *And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:—*29. *And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.—*30. *Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?—*31. *Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?—*32. *(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:)* *for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.—*33. *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.—*34. *Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*

IN the passage immediately preceding that which we have just now read, our Lord warns his hearers against the love and pur-

suit of worldly riches. He does not say that worldly riches are to be considered as unlawful possessions: But he represents them as unworthy of any great regard, when compared with “the true riches”—with those things which belong to our future happiness; the former being of short and uncertain duration, while the latter are exposed to no chance of injury, and will assuredly last for ever. He states strongly the incompatibility that subsists between devotedness to the creature, and devotedness to the Creator—and maintains the necessity of our being either decidedly the servants of God, or decidedly the servants of Mammon. And he insists on our being careful to form a correct judgment as to the source from which we are to derive our chief good, because on that will depend the nature of the dispositions that we cherish, and the tenour of the character that we support. If we determine that our chief good lies in the favour and service of God, we shall of course have the whole current of our thoughts, and words, and

actions, flowing in a heavenly direction, and be exalted above every thing that is vicious and base; whereas, if we make our chief good to consist in earthly treasures, and sensual gratifications, our souls will be continually wedded to the dust on which we tread, and the general strain of our deportment will be grovelling, unholy, and contemptible.

I trust, my friends, you have attended to the maxims and exhortations of Christ on this important subject—that you have seriously contrasted the objects which he offers to your choice, and given the preference to that which he recommends—that you have “set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth”—and that, equally unmoved by the difficulties, and unseduced by the allurements, which beset your path, you will practically and steadily maintain the good part that you have chosen, and advance with unabating ardour towards that moral perfection, and that celestial bliss, on which you have fixed your ambition and your hopes. If this

be the case—if these be the views you have embraced—and this the resolution you have formed,—you are in a great measure prepared for that more minute and extended exercise of the same great principle to which your attention is directed in the concluding part of the chapter. You were formerly required to give the preference, in an infinite degree, of heavenly over earthly enjoyments—of the service of God over the pleasures and pursuits of the world. And here you are required to estimate at such a low rate, even what is necessary to the preservation and comfort of life, as that it shall not awaken in your minds any painful or extraordinary concern whatever.

“Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.”

It may here be proper to remark, that our Saviour does by no means inculcate indifference to what respects our present and outward condition. There is an attention

to that which is not only natural but lawful, and not only lawful but virtuous. And he who should feel no desire, and make no effort to “provide things honest in the sight of all men,” would be guilty both of disregarding the arrangements of Providence, and of disobeying the precepts of religion. The very first law of our being is to secure its continuance. It is the dictate of all our feelings to seek what is agreeable both to mind and body, and nothing forbids the pursuit, so long as it is confined within the limits of innocence. The necessity of our condition, the operation of external circumstances on our active powers, and the maxims and examples held out in holy writ to influence and regulate our conduct,—all these conspire to engage us in active exertions, which terminate directly or indirectly in our personal aggrandisement and satisfaction. And while industry thus contributes to the support and the comfort of animal life, or of life as connected with this world, so we are acquainted with no authority which sets any bounds to this indus-

try, while it is under the controul of religious principle, or to the rewards with which it is crowned, while these are gratefully received, moderately enjoyed, and applied to useful and legitimate purposes. All this is consistent with what we owe to our God and our Saviour, and our eternal interests; much more, therefore, are our religious obligations unimpaired by a due regard to those means which may be requisite for obtaining food, and clothing, and shelter, and all the other blessings which may be comprehended under the necessities and conveniences of "the life that now is."

But while our Saviour condemns the worldly mindedness which is eager to "lay up much goods in store for many years," and makes it its principal and favourite employment to accumulate, without regard either to honourable means or useful ends, he also disapproves of any immoderate anxiety about obtaining an adequate supply, even to the most common and simple wants of our nature. We are to "take no thought

for our life ;” that is, we are not to allow our minds to be agitated and distressed with cares about our subsistence, as if by securing that we had secured every thing, and as if in losing that all were lost. We are to banish all harassing doubts, and all excessive fears, that may suggest themselves on this point, as unworthy alike of our present principles and our future expectations. We are not, indeed, to repose in indolence, as if it were a matter of no consequence whether our life were prolonged or not ; we are not to suppress every feeling of ambition, to resist every motive to diligence, to be untouched by the charms of independence and prosperity, and to cast ourselves, with a mixture of presumption and folly, on the chances or the charity of the world ;—no ; we are to employ the means with which we are intrusted, the skill of our minds and the vigour of our bodies, for lengthening the duration and promoting the usefulness of the life that our Maker has given us. But having done our duty by doing that, we are to do no

more. We are not only to refrain from attempting to better our circumstances by unlawful methods, but we are to guard most scrupulously against that impatient, fretful, over-anxious spirit, in which these practices frequently originate, which is so prevalent among the votaries of the world, and which is at once so unbecoming in itself, and so pernicious in its effects.

The reasons for subduing and extinguishing this temper, as suggested by the passage before us, are various and conclusive.

1. In the *first* place, there is our hope and expectation of the life which is to come. The life which is to come is surely infinitely more precious than the life that now is. The life that now is has many cares and sorrows attending it ; for man who spends it “ is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward ;” and its best consolations are mixed and imperfect—they are absolutely insipid without the hope that is full of immortality. But the life which is to come excludes

every thing that is evil, and contains every thing that is desirable and good : it is distinguished by all that is honourable, by all that is happy, by all that is glorious ; and while it has thus “ a fulness of joy,” its “ pleasures are for evermore.” Assured of an interest in this, of which nothing can deprive me, (the true Christian may say,) why should I be greatly concerned about the other ? Supposing that, during all the time of my pilgrimage, I were steeped in poverty and distress, should I repine when I anticipate the heavenly riches, and the endless felicity in which these afflictions are to terminate ? Or, supposing that the extremity of want, and the violence of disease, were to cut me off in the midst of my days—what then ? If I have embraced and believed the Gospel with my whole heart, I should in that case suffer no real loss. For “ this corruptible would put on incorruption, and this mortal would put on immortality,” and “ death would be swallowed up in victory.” No ; it is not for me to rise early and sit up late, and eat the

bread of carefulness, and allow anxiety about the meat that perisheth to drink up my very spirit—when I have “the bread which came down from heaven,” and which nourisheth my soul to everlasting life. “After all these things let the Gentiles seek.” Their views of futurity are dark and uncomfortable. The promises of God’s covenant are unknown to them. The prospects of his glory have never been disclosed to their view. They have nothing better than their present portion; and it is natural for them to give their most anxious attention, and their most strenuous labours, to its security and increase. But, blessed be God, I have other views and other hopes. I “look not to those things which are seen and temporal, but to those things that are unseen and eternal.” I am not obliged, indeed, and I am not taught to despise the good things of this life—to neglect the care of the body—to abstract myself from all considerations of external comfort. But I regard these as of comparatively little moment. They deserve not one dis-

tracting thought. Take them all away—only leave me the hope of glory—the heavenly inheritance, and I give all my fears of indigence, and hunger, and destitution, to the wind. Reposing on the bosom of my Saviour, and looking forward to that “rest which remaineth for the people of God,” “I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content.” “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”—But, besides the hope and expectation of the life that is to come, there is

2. In the *second* place, a belief in the superintending care and providence of God as another reason for “taking no thought for our life.” This consideration is enforced and illustrated by our Saviour with great simplicity of sentiment, and great beauty of expression. He argues from the goodness which we have already experienced at the hand of our heavenly Father, who knows what we need, and is both able and willing to bestow it: and he argues from the care which God exercises towards other

beings, animate and inanimate, in which we cannot suppose that he takes a greater or more affectionate interest than he does in us, the children of men. And by necessary inference, he inculcates that unlimited trust in the great Creator, which a knowledge of his character, and a conviction of his providence, are so well calculated to inspire—not authorising a presumptuous dependance which would preclude exertion, but that sober and pious confidence which stimulates to diligence, looks for the blessing, and supports and tranquillizes and cheers the mind amidst disappointment and misfortune.

“Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” God has imparted to you the gift of life itself, and is not that of far greater value than the meat by which it is supported? He has given you these bodies about which you feel so much concern; and is not their worth far higher than that of the raiment by which they are to be protected from the cold? The Being to whom you are indebted for these bless-

ings is not only good—he is consistent in his goodness; and having received from him the greater, you may also expect to receive from him the less; especially when the one boon may be considered as useless or inconvenient without the other. Having endowed you with an organized body and a living soul, he is virtually pledged to bestow what is necessary to nourish your body in vigour, and to uphold your soul in life; and you cannot entertain such hard thoughts of your kind and merciful Creator, as to suppose that he will not redeem his pledge, and maintain the workmanship of his own hands. Only do your duty; employ the means of subsistence with which you are furnished—trust in the agency and efficacy of his blessing—and nothing which is requisite shall be withheld from you, so far as it is consistent with that spiritual and immortal existence which he has conferred upon you, and in whose vast importance every other consideration may well be absorbed and lost.

You may be farther encouraged to the

exercise of this trust in Providence, by looking around you upon creation, and observing that the care and kindness of God are over all his works. For surely you cannot imagine that man, who is so fearfully and wonderfully made, should be less dear to him than those creatures over whom he has invested him with dominion. For example, Why should you be immoderately anxious about the sustenance of life, when you behold the birds of the air? “They sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns: yet your heavenly Father feedeth them: are not ye much better”—more precious in his regard—“than they?” If he supports them who are thus the immediate pensioners of his bounty, will not he support you also, by blessing your industry with success when you are in health, and by awakening the sympathies of your brethren in your behalf, in the season of poverty and sickness? If he exercises his paternal care in the preservation of those creatures that hold such an inferior place in his works, and are soon to exist

no more for ever, that paternal care must undoubtedly embrace the preservation and the comfort of man, to whom God has given more knowledge and understanding than the fowls of heaven, whom he has graciously destined to a higher sphere of being, and for whose eternal salvation he has sent his own Son to suffer and to die.

Look again, but still lower—look to the vegetable tribes, and let all undue anxiety about suitable raiment be banished from your thoughts. “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore if God so clothe the grass of the field which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?” You perceive how carefully he shelters, and how beautifully he adorns, the flowers that bloom but for a day; and are you so destitute of faith, or is your faith so weak, that you will not trust in the extension of his protecting

hand to you?—to you who have been formed after his own image—who have an important station of usefulness and duty assigned you in the world—and who, though doomed like the flowers of the field to be cut down and cast into the grave, are yet destined to rise again in renovated strength and beauty, and then live to die no more.

Be not, therefore, faithless but believing. Confide in the ever-watchful, and ever-gracious providence of the Almighty. Cast all your care upon him, for he careth for you. And, surrounded as you are with innumerable proofs of his fatherly love—of his preserving goodness; and feeling that in your very creation—in the frame of your bodies, and in the structure of your minds, and in the future destiny of your being,—he has given you the most striking tokens and earnest of his bounty, consider it as most unreasonable and undutiful to harbour one anxious or disquieting speculation about the wants of this mortal life. Go not about to ask, with the impatience and distrust of a mere worldling, “What

shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed?" It is enough for you who believe in God, and who believe also in Christ, to be assured that you have a Father who rules in heaven and on earth, and who "knows that you have need of all these things."—"Ask, and it shall be given to you."

3. Again, another reason for dismissing all immoderate thoughtfulness or anxiety concerning the subsistence and comfort of a present life, is, that it is as useless as it is unnecessary. "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" The word which is here rendered *stature*, should, from a regard to the consistency and analogy of the passage, have been rendered *age*—a translation, of which it is correctly susceptible. We are not, indeed, accustomed to speak of *a cubit of age*, and yet it is not unusual to apply the accidents of space to the accidents of time, as when we say the *span* of human *life*. So that the general meaning of the argu-

ment is this: You are extremely anxious to prolong your stay in this world. You exercise much distressing and agitating care, in order to procure a continued supply to your bodily wants. But it is all in vain. The end and measure of your days are appointed. And you cannot stretch them beyond the limits of that appointment. Do your duty in using every legitimate and practicable means for the preservation and comfort of life—and then, with prayer for the divine blessing, leave the result to God. You need not go any farther. Every anxious thought—every eager effort beyond that, is altogether superfluous—not only implying the sin of distrust in Providence, but adding folly to guilt by its total fruitlessness as to the purpose which it is intended or expected to serve.—And while the immoderate anxiety against which our Saviour is guarding us, is unnecessary and useless, he also suggests,

4. As another reason for excluding it from our minds, that it is pernicious. “Take,

therefore," says he, in the last verse of the chapter, "no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself: sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." This is a wise and merciful admonition. It does not require us to lay aside all prudent and prospective care for future subsistence. It only condemns excessive anxiety about the provision of to-morrow. If to-morrow comes, we are under the same divine guidance and protection which are sustaining us to-day. The goodness and mercy which have hitherto followed us, will not forsake us then. Unforeseen necessities may occur—unexpected difficulties may arise—unimagined distresses may befall us; but we shall be in the same world—we shall be under the government of the same God—we shall have access to the same throne of prayer—and we shall have the same hopes to animate our souls. Why, then, should we overload to-day with burdensome and preposterous cares about to-morrow? Sufficient to this day are its own contingencies—without the unwarranted anticipation of

future trials. We have a part to act---we have duties to perform---which require from us the vigorous and unfettered exercise of all our powers, and therefore we must avoid the evil against which our Saviour here warns us, as calculated to clog and paralyse our endeavours. We must “work the work of God while it is day:” and beware of allowing our eyes to be darkened, and our spirits to be depressed, and our efforts to be interrupted, by a premature night of care, and anxiety, and sorrow. “Now is the accepted time”—let that time be improved to the utmost. “Now is the day of salvation”---let that day occupy its full and undisturbed place in the life of preparation we are leading for eternity. Let us throw off all tormenting fears about coming wants and coming evils—we have a sufficiency of existing wants and existing evils to think about; or rather let us exchange them for a rational and pious trust in that divine providence which has never failed us; and let us give our undistracted attention, and our undivided efforts, to the

service which God requires of us—to the “work of faith” and to the “labour of love” which are to fit us for immortality.

My friends, you should not care much about this life, which soon terminates; or about this world, whose “fashion soon passeth away.” But there is something else which demands and deserves all the anxiety you can feel—all the care you can exercise—all the labour you can bestow; something to which your first, and your highest, and your constant regards should be devoted; something in comparison of which every thing else sinks into insignificance. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness:” study with all your might to secure an interest in the blessings of the Gospel; to become heirs of the kingdom that is above; to find pardon and acceptance, by submitting to that righteousness which is established as the foundation of the sinner’s hope; and to acquire those holy habits of mind and conduct which shall qualify you for holding divine communion here, and for enjoying eternal happiness

hereafter. Do this, and your best interests are provided for—your highest happiness is secured. And having thus obtained a right to eternal life, and a meekness for it, all the things that pertain to this life shall be added to you. You shall receive them in so far as they may be consistent with the glory of God and your own essential good; and more than this you do not need, and should not desire. And if they should be withheld—it matters not. You have the friendship of Jehovah in possession—you have the joys of heaven in reversion. Your outward circumstances may be poor and wretched—your “flesh and your heart may faint and fail”—but “God is the strength of your heart and your portion for ever.” —“Many are saying, who will shew us any good?”—but it will be the language of your soul, “Lord lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in our heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased.” And while others are toiling to gain this deceitful and perishing world, and have hardly

a wish that reaches above or beyond it; while they are not happy even when it gratifies their ambition, and are miserable when it eludes their pursuit, you shall be enabled, whether in prosperity or in adversity, calmly to repose yourselves on the hope of an "inheritance" in heaven, "which is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Amen.

LECTURE IV.

LUKE ix. 51—56.

51. *And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,—52. And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him.—53. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.—54. And when his disciples, James and John, saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?—55. But he turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.—56. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.*

THE period was now approaching when Christ's ministry should terminate. That event is here denoted by his being "received up"—that is, into heaven. From heaven he had come to execute upon earth the merciful scheme which God had

devised in behalf of fallen men. And having finished this important work, it followed of course that he should return to that place of happiness and glory from which he had descended, there to receive the reward which his obedience had merited, and to exercise the authority which he had acquired for the immediate government and ultimate salvation of his church.

Previous, however, to his ascension, it was necessary for him to undergo the suffering of death. It was an essential part of his work that he should die as a sacrifice of atonement for human guilt—that he should go from earth to heaven by the *cross*—“bearing the sins of many.” And whether we think of the torture of body, or the agony of soul, to which he was there subjected, it must be concluded, that his “sorrow was like unto no other sorrow.” In his case, there was a combination of pain and ignominy, which it required no ordinary courage to encounter, and no ordinary fortitude to endure.

Now, of all this he had a perfect fore-

knowledge. He knew that as certainly as he went up to Jerusalem, so certainly would he be involved in these distressful circumstances. It was not merely a matter of conjecture and apprehension—but a prospect whose reality was as much present to his mind as if he had been already nailed to the tree. It was not merely an inference deduced from the hostility of the Jews—but an original and indispensable part of his mediatorial engagement, from which there was not the remotest possibility of escaping.

And what did Christ do with all this affliction before him? Did he flinch from it in any measure? Did he express any vehement desire—did he use any anxious endeavours, to avoid it? Did he turn away into a different path, and seek, in some sequestered corner of Judea, that personal security which was denied to him in its chief city? No; he set his face to go to Jerusalem: thither he deliberately directed his course, as if there had been nothing to fear; his purpose was formed, and he sted-

fastly and resolutely adhered to it. Gloomy and terrible was the scene through which he had to pass ; but it could not subdue his spirit, nor infuse into him one cowardly or unworthy feeling. Anxious to obey the will, and promote the glory of his Father who sent him ; impelled by the ardent benevolence which animated his breast ; and encouraged and cheered by the triumphs of grace, which should finally crown his perseverance, he moved onward, with an elevated soul and a firm step, to the fulfilment of his arduous task. “ For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame.”

While we admire in all this the greatness of Christ's mind, and the dignity of his conduct ; and while we feel the warmest gratitude to him for the love which he thus exhibited, let us not forget to imitate him as far as imitation is practicable. We cannot be called to suffer exactly those things which he suffered ; we may not be called to lay down our life in any manner, for the cause of truth ; but the principle

which our Saviour displayed on this occasion, and on which, after his example, we are required to act, is, that the claims of duty are paramount and supreme. It is not so with the world, but it should be so with the followers of Jesus. In the world we see men preferring ease and safety to the most urgent calls of religious and moral obligation. Nothing else, indeed, is to be expected from those whose views are confined to temporal things, and whose sole object is the gratification of their passions and appetites. But it should be very different with such as have believed in Christ, and embraced his Gospel. Their minds are supposed to be emancipated from the bondage of corruption, to aspire after conformity to the divine will, and, in the pursuit of that conformity, not merely to renounce every selfish indulgence, but to submit to the severest hardships, if such sacrifices shall become necessary, for the maintenance of a good conscience. This results from the very nature of true religion; it is expressly enjoined in the sacred Scriptures;

and it is powerfully recommended and enforced by our Lord in the uniform tenor of his conduct.

Let us, my friends, be at all times prepared to “walk,” in this respect, “as Christ also walked.” In general, it is not requisite for us to forego much pleasure that is worth enjoying, or to suffer much inconvenience that is worth avoiding, in order that we may preserve our fidelity. But whether our dangers be great or inconsiderable, our resolution should be the same—to part with all things, and to endure all things, rather than shrink from the performance of any part of our duty. We should not “count even our lives dear to us,” so that we may “keep the commandments,” and “finish our course with joy.”

We have the same kind of encouragements to support and animate us, which animated and supported Christ. And, above all, we have the promise and the hope of being “received up.” Heaven is set before us, purchased for us, and taken possession of in our name, by Him whom

we follow. Our path may be crowded with difficulties, beset with dangers, and darkened with the shadow of death, but it terminates in "joy that is unspeakable and full of glory." Let us, therefore, persevere in it, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left, but stedfastly setting our faces Zion-ward; and, having finished our labours, we shall ascend on high, and enter into that "rest which remaineth for the people of God."

The way from Galilee to Jerusalem lay through Samaria. The inhabitants of that country had a bitter and inveterate enmity against the Jews—an enmity which was reciprocal. And our Saviour, aware of this fact, and not choosing to put the accommodation of himself and his disciples to the risk of the moment, sent messengers before hand into one of the villages, with instructions to prepare lodgings and provisions for them. The Samaritans, however, refused to admit or entertain him. They did not feel much disposed, in any case, to shew kindness to a people so ob-

noxious to them as the Jews—though it cannot be supposed that they would withhold food and shelter from all of them that happened at any time to be travelling to Jerusalem. But when the journey was connected with the subject of religion, their national antipathy was expressed without reserve and without mercy. And, on this occasion, they knew well the object which our Saviour had in view. “They did not receive him,” says the Evangelist, “because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.” They understood that he was going to that city for the express purpose of worshipping. And this was an indirect censure of their belief, that God should be worshipped on Mount Gerizzim only, and not at Jerusalem. It was openly proclaiming that they were in the wrong, and that their hated rivals were in the right. It was deciding against them in a controversy which had interested their strongest feelings, and produced habits of relentless hostility. And it could not fail to be peculiarly offensive to them in this instance, con-

sidering the precise object of our Saviour's visit. They knew, from the season of the year, that he was going to partake of the Feast of Dedication. This festival was instituted for the purpose of commemorating the purification of the Temple of Jerusalem, after it had been polluted by the idolatries of Antiochus Epiphanes—to whom, however, the Samaritans had declared a willingness to submit. Christ, therefore, was about to engage in a service which not only implied in general that they were not true worshippers of God, since they did not for that purpose go up to Jerusalem, according to the divine commandment; but which implied, in a more particular manner, his distinct condemnation of their conduct, in agreeing to receive those abominable and impious rites which Antiochus had been desirous to impose upon them. On these accounts they would not admit Christ and his disciples to that share in their hospitality to which the stranger is entitled, and which, in ordinary circumstances, he is accustomed to receive.

What a melancholy instance is this of the effect of religious differences! And how sad to think that, far from being confined to the Jews and the Samaritans of old, it has been but too common among the followers of Christ! What keen animosities, what bitter strifes, what sanguinary wars, are recorded in the history of the Christian church, as originating in men taking opposite views of the same doctrine, or of the same ordinance! Our lot, indeed, has fallen on times which, in this respect, are comparatively peaceable and enlightened. The general diffusion of knowledge has given a tone of liberality, as well as of independence, to the human mind. The nature of Christianity itself is far better understood, and its humanising influence more powerfully felt. The institutions which Christian zeal and wisdom have established for the relief of distress, for the education of the young, and for the spread of evangelical truth, have enlarged the ideas of those who support them, and given them a kindly and extensive interest in the welfare of

their fellow creatures. In particular, the Society for circulating the Word of God throughout the world, which does immortal honour to the age and country in which we live, has broken down many walls of partition, and by bringing men of different classes and denominations together, and uniting them in a labour of love, has made them more intimately acquainted with one another, has convinced them that real piety and worth are not confined to any single sect, has withdrawn their attention from small points in which they differ, and fixed it on the great points in which they agree, and taught them to cherish among themselves that benevolent affection, which animates them to the good work in which they are co-operating.

But, notwithstanding all this, the evil which rendered the Samaritans so odious, exists among us in a certain measure, frequently interrupting the freedom, and disturbing the harmony of social intercourse, and sometimes breaking out into open feuds, that are alike dishonourable and in-

jurious to the Christian name. It is no uncommon thing to see men, whose integrity of mind and respectability of conduct it is impossible to question—men whom we could not hesitate to number among those who are “followers of that which is good”—men who, in other respects, are guides and examples to their brethren—it is no uncommon thing to see men of this description manifesting displeasure and aversion to those who do not entertain the same opinions with themselves on matters of faith or discipline. They limit their favourable regards and kind offices to the individuals with whom they are united in sentiment or in communion; and seem to think it a renunciation of their principles, if they go beyond that narrow circle, in deeds of substantial and habitual friendship. At least they refuse to associate with them, or to confide in them, or to serve them, much more than what the ordinary business and common usages of life render indispensibly requisite. Nay, even among some who appear to be very liberal

and indulgent, the temper of which we speak prevails in all its native deformity and hatefulness. For though they will allow us to differ from them in religion, they will not give us the same liberty in other things which are of far less moment—for instance, in politics. If we go aside in that subject from the exact line which they have chosen to pursue, they think themselves entitled to speak of us, and to treat us, with a distance and a severity to which the violation of moral duty would scarcely have subjected us. Now, it is evident, that these persons are actuated by the very same spirit of intolerance which prevented the Samaritans from receiving Christ and his disciples. It does not display itself in religion, because they have contrived to cast religion out of their catalogue of important subjects; and as it is a matter of indifference to themselves, they feel no anxiety as to the ideas which may be entertained of it by others.—In short, although the proud and selfish bigotry, to which we allude, is not nearly so prevalent

as formerly, nor produces such violent effects, still it is in various forms more general than we are apt to suspect ; and as it is at once so accordant with the principles of a corrupted heart, and so unbecoming our character, both as men and Christians, we cannot be too much on our guard against it.

1. For this purpose, let us consider, in the *first* place, how unreasonable the thing is in itself.—We cannot arrogate to ourselves the attribute of infallibility. In every thing we are liable to mistake ; and in the very point with regard to which others have dissented from our opinion, and thereby incurred our dislike, it is not at all impossible that they may be right, and that we may be wrong. And is it not foolish, in that case, to run the risk of adding injustice to error, and making our own blunder a pretext for unkind behaviour to those who have committed none? But granting that we were certainly and indisputably right in the sentiments which we hold, that can be no good reason for scowling upon

those to whom these sentiments seem erroneous, unless they were possessed of that very infallibility of judgment which we have disclaimed for ourselves, and had chosen, merely through perversity and wickedness, to oppose what we have advanced. Constituted as they are, with all the imperfections of humanity, of which *we also* have our full share, it is to be expected that these imperfections will appear in many of the notions which they adopt, just as we ourselves have formed erroneous ideas in many other particulars, even after the most careful and candid consideration; so that though there is much occasion in all this for mutual regret, and perhaps mutual compassion, we cannot proceed to condemn them, without partaking of the condemnation which we have passed, and without confounding together the errors of the head and those of the heart.

2. But consider, *secondly*, that to act towards those whose religious creed is at variance with ours, as the Samaritans did

towards Christ and his disciples, is as impolitic in effect, as it is unreasonable in itself.—If we firmly believe the peculiar system of doctrine which we profess, and are deeply convinced either of its high importance or its absolute necessity, we will be naturally desirous to recommend it to the faith and the practice of others. Indeed, our offence at those who have rejected it, if it have any good foundation at all, proceeds on this very principle, that they reject what it is useful or requisite for them to receive; that they not only acquire some moral taint by this rejection, but are in consequence of that exposed to ruin and misery; and that their only chance of being saved—the very object which has roused us to any concern about them—is by forsaking their own system and embracing ours. Well then, how is that end most likely to be accomplished? Is it by keeping them at a disdainful distance, and avoiding their company as if it were infectious? Is it by declining to render them any assistance which they may need or request from us?

Is it by speaking of them in the language of harshness or contempt? Is it by treating them in any or in every respect with those tokens of displeasure which we should exhibit towards immoral conduct? No, surely; the only effect of this would be to provoke a more decided opposition, and to rivet faster than ever their prejudices against the views which we should wish to inculcate. It would furnish them with an argument against our doctrine, in the evil dispositions with which they observe our adherence to it accompanied. It would thus justify them to their own minds for holding fast by their error, and render all the attempts we might otherwise make to convert them to the truth, inefficient and unavailing. No man, we will venture to assert, was ever reclaimed by such procedure; but many have been confirmed by it in their attachment to false opinions, which a more rational and lenient treatment would have soon prevailed upon them to abandon.

3. In the *third* place, the conduct we are condemning is not only unreasonable in itself, and inexpedient as to its effect ; it is besides directly contrary to the precepts of true religion.—The Samaritans admitted no more of the Scriptures than the books of Moses. Yet even there they might have read a lesson which dictated a very different reception to Christ and his disciples—for there it was written, “The Lord God loveth the stranger”—“love ye therefore the stranger.” But they forgot the commandment and the character of Jehovah, amidst those prejudices and antipathies which religious bigotry had created. And if this was criminal in them who laboured under so many disadvantages, how much more criminal must it be in us who are favoured with the “Gospel of the grace of God,” which uniformly breathes the spirit, and expressly enjoins the practice, of universal love! It is characteristic of that benevolence which the religion of Christ requires us to cultivate, that it has no respect of persons—so that if it has any authority over us,

we will be kind and affectionate to all. And being so comprehensive in the range of its objects, it must certainly embrace those who have done nothing more than employed their understanding on the subject of religion, with that freedom and independence which we ourselves have exercised, and, as might have been anticipated, have, in some things, arrived at a different or an opposite conclusion. To be offended at them, therefore, on that account, is to disobey the royal law of charity.

Let us beware, then, of sacrificing our common Christianity at the shrine of bigotry, and of setting mere contrarieties of sentiment above the obligations of humanity and kindness. It is not meant, indeed, nor is it requisite to this, that we should abandon our principles, or regard it as a matter of no consequence what doctrines we believe. No: in this respect, also, let us do our duty. Let us inquire, and think, and decide for ourselves. Whatever be our convictions of the truth, by these let us steadily and conscientiously abide. And

if our brethren appear to us to be mistaken, let us endeavour, by sound argument, and scriptural statements, to give them juster and more correct views of religion. But in all this, let it be a main object to preserve our benevolent feelings unimpaired. If we differ in opinion, let us at least, and at any rate, be united in affection, and strive to shew, by our meekness, and liberality, and good offices, even to those who seem to have departed farthest from our standard of orthodoxy, that we have imbibed the spirit of our divine Master, and are under the blessed dominion of that charity which is the “bond of perfectness, and the fulfilling of the whole law.”

The conduct of the Samaritans provoked even the mildest of our Lord's disciples. And their resentment for this want of hospitality went so far, that they proposed to Christ that the village and all its inhabitants should be instantaneously consumed by fire from heaven—pleading as an argument for this, the example of an ancient prophet. “And when his disciples James

and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elias did?" Our Saviour rejected their proposal, administered to them a seasonable reproof, and pointed out the inconsistency of their temper with their character and situation. "But he turned, and rebuked them and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

The error of the disciples was twofold. In the *first* place, they allowed themselves to be so much hurried away by passion as to do what was equally unjust, cruel, and imprudent. And, *secondly*, they perverted Scripture, in order to justify the excess of their indignation. It was natural and proper for them to feel strongly on the occasion. Their own comfort, the honour of their Master, and the superiority of the Jewish worship—all suffered by the repulsive treatment which they experienced from the Samaritans. But their feelings were

not duly regulated, nor sufficiently restrained. Instead of forgiveness, they thought of nothing but revenge: and instead of forbearance, they thought of nothing but the execution of immediate judgment.

Christ, however, with that perfect command of himself by which he was so much distinguished, and in the genuine spirit of that office with which he was invested, gave instant and decided opposition to their rash intention. “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.” The spirit of Elijah is not suitable to you. He lived under the dispensation of the law, and his whole conduct corresponded with the severe and rigorous tone of that dispensation.—In the case alluded to, he destroyed the messengers of Ahaziah who was persisting in the crime of idolatry, and of whose idolatrous practices these messengers were at this very moment the willing instruments—and the crime of idolatry was one which justly merited, which actually required, and which uniformly received, the strongest marks of the divine displeasure. The offence which

was committed, the persons who were engaged in the transaction, the times in which it took place, and the peculiar genius of that establishment which it was intended to support—all of these justified the act of Elijah, to which you have referred as authority for the wishes you have expressed. But you are differently situated—you belong to a dispensation whose nature, and object, and circumstances, are characterized by mercy and by mildness. Of this you do not seem to be sufficiently aware; or at least you have allowed the provocation of the moment to overpower your better feelings and your better judgment. Let me therefore remind you, that you are the disciples of the Son of man; of him who has humbled himself for the salvation of sinners; who has come into the world—not to visit human guilt with instant punishment, and to shew his power and his justice, by scattering death among erring mortals—but to deliver even the chief of sinners from the wrath to come, and, as an earnest and a proof of this be-

nevolent design, to treat offenders with patience, and compassion, and every practicable expression of that love which prompted my mission. If, therefore, you should now be gratified in your resentment against these poor, blinded, and perverse Samaritans, how little accordant would it be with the errand on which I have come, with the doctrine I am commissioned to preach, and with all that I am to do and to suffer for procuring pardon, and reconciliation, and happiness, to the guilty children of men!

Let us, my friends, apply the admonition to ourselves. And when injury or insult is about to kindle our resentful feelings, and precipitate us into acts of unkindness and severity, let us recal to our recollection the language and the conduct of Christ. Let us remember that we profess to be his followers, and that therefore "the same mind should be in us which was also in him." Let us remember that we are sinners, and that had God sent fire

from heaven to consume us whenever we transgressed his law, this day would not have found us joining in his worship, and meditating on his word. Let us remember that our own forgiveness at the hand of the Almighty is made, as it were, to depend on the forgiveness which we exercise towards our offending brethren, and therefore that if we are revengeful in our dispositions and our conduct, we can have no well-grounded hope of salvation. Let us remember, that the "charity which covereth a multitude of sins," and will "forgive even to seventy times seven," is an effect of faith, and a "fruit of the Spirit;" and, consequently, that we ought to cherish a lively faith in that Redeemer who shed his blood for the remission of sins, and to pray earnestly for more liberal supplies of that Spirit, under whose gracious influences we shall be enabled to "walk in love." And, finally, let us remember, that the Scriptures are given, not that we may find in them any encouragement or any justification in the exercise of malevolent affections, but

that we may be taught to “love God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves;” that we should search and study them maturely, that we may not misapprehend and misapply the lessons which they are intended to inculcate; and that when we wish to have an example to guide us in the path of duty, we should, without neglecting others, look chiefly and habitually to that of Christ, “the Author and Finisher of our faith,” whose breast glowed with benevolence even to the unkind and unthankful, who “endured patiently the contradiction of sinners against himself,” and who, “when he was persecuted in one city or village, departed and went into another.” May each of us be enabled to “go and do likewise.” Amen.

LECTURE V.

JOHN xii. 44—50.

44. *Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me.—45. And he that seeth me, seeth him that sent me.—46. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.—47. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.—48. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him at the last day.—49. For I have not spoken of myself: but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment what I should say and what I should speak.—50. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting; whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.*

IN this passage there are three points offered to our consideration. 1st, The authority of which Christ was possessed as a divine messenger. 2dly, The consequence of rejecting him. And, 3dly, The consequence of receiving him.

1. In the *first* place, there is the authority of which Christ was possessed as a divine messenger.

On other occasions, Christ did not scruple to assert the divinity of his nature; and, on the ground of his being one with the Father, to demand the reverence and submission of the Jews. Here, however, he keeps that argument entirely out of sight, insists on his delegated authority as a prophet, and points out the precise view that is to be entertained of him in that character. In none of the Evangelists do we meet with so many and such explicit intimations of his *deity*, and, at the same time, in none of them is he so frequently introduced as speaking of his official and derived capacity. The two statements, it is evident, if not to a violent controversialist, at least to an unprejudiced mind, are not inconsistent; for though they refer to the same person, they refer to that person as possessed of two distinct natures, and acting in two distinct characters. There is a mystery, but no contradiction.

But, as to practical effect,—as to the real meaning of our Saviour's language, and the obligations which it imposes on us, these must be the same in both cases. In the one case, our attention is directed to God immediately ; in the other he speaks to us by a messenger ; in both it is the Supreme Being that actually addresses us—it is to him that our regards are really and ultimately due—and it is to him that we are responsible for the manner in which we receive the message that is communicated.

Most material, indeed, it is, that we firmly maintain the doctrine, and habitually feel the impression, of Christ's divinity. In many respects, that is of essential importance. But, in the instance before us, it is of no moment. If God speaks to us—it may be in one way, or it may be in another—it may be by a voice from heaven, or by an angel, or by a human being—still that is of no essential consequence. The fact is the same—it is God that speaks. He may hold intercourse with his creatures in any manner that seems good to

himself. The channel through which he holds it does not change the reality of the fact, nor in the least degree affect its importance. The message which he sends, remains in all its original authority. The only point which challenges our scrutiny, or at which any hesitation is warrantable, is the *authenticity* of the message. Having ascertained that it has come to us from God, or that the person who brings it was commissioned by him to do so—our duty plainly and indisputably is, to receive it with as much respect, and with as much humility, as if God had conveyed it to us without the intervention of any subordinate agent whatsoever, as if it had been a voice proceeding from the excellent uncreated glory, or as if it had been impressed upon our mind by the energy of the Spirit, with all the force and vividness of a primary sensation. If it be proved by sufficient evidence, and to my perfect conviction, that a fellow creature is appointed, inspired, and taught of God to deliver to me a certain system of doctrine, it would



not have been in the least degree more incumbent on me to embrace it, although I had been carried into the highest heavens, and permitted, in beatific vision, to read it as recorded in the eternal and unerring counsels of the Divine mind.

Indeed, the former is a safer and more effectual mode of producing conviction than the latter; it is more consonant to the frame of our intellectual constitution, and to the common habits of the understanding, and the use of it therefore marks at once the condescension and the wisdom of God. The latter supersedes, in some measure, the use of our reasoning faculties, and consequently exposes us more to the influence of delusion: whereas, the former, by coming within the range of our ordinary powers of comprehension and judgment, and admitting of an easy application of the rules by which we usually decide, is better calculated to satisfy us of the truth or falsehood of any fact or any proposition which falls to be examined. Jesus Christ pretends to have come from



God; he exhibits the credentials of his mission; we investigate them with all the attention and care that we can bring to the consideration of so interesting a subject; the evidence on which he rests his claims to our belief, undergoes a thorough scrutiny; whatever objections can be brought against his pretensions are duly weighed; all that he said and did, is subjected to a process to which the human mind is perfectly competent; and such a conclusion is drawn as appears to be warranted by the nature of the facts that are ascertained, and of the arguments that are employed, in the course of the inquiry. We proceed here as we do in a thousand other cases. And having proved in this way that Jesus of Nazareth was empowered and qualified by God to instruct us on the subject of religion, it follows, irresistibly, that the instructions which he gives us are divine,—that they must be considered as flowing to us from that source in which infinite wisdom and supreme authority hold their residence.

This is the doctrine which our Saviour

distinctly lays down in the passage before us. "Jesus cried and said, "He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me." I am an ambassador from God; if any person believes in me, in that character, let him recollect that his belief, far from resting with me, does, by necessary consequence, extend to the Sovereign whom I serve and represent. "I have not spoken of myself." In my delegated capacity, I have declared nothing of my own—nothing of my own suggestion, or by my own authority; "But the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say and what I should speak." I have received a definite commission from God; within the limits of that commission I have strictly confined myself; and every thing that you have heard from me is a part of the message which I am appointed to declare. "Whatsoever I speak, therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak." I have been minutely faithful to my trust. Nothing has been allowed to mingle with the

pure doctrine which I bring from heaven. I teach you in every respect as I have been taught of God. Every word I utter is by his immediate inspiration, and under his authoritative sanction. So that when you are listening to me, you are actually listening to Him. And think not that I require you to take all this on my bare gratuitous assertion. In the miracles which I perform, and in every part of my conduct, I demonstrate to you that I came from God. I shew you an entire submission to his will, and a constant devotedness to his glory: And I do works which I could not do without him, and which he never would empower me to exhibit, unless it were in support of his own truth. “He that seeth me, seeth him that sent me.” If you look to me with candour, and reflect on what you see, you will find that I have manifested the perfections of my Father. And especially, I have manifested his power, which is not only one of his essential attributes, but that one by which I am chiefly enabled to prove that I am his Messenger

and his Son—that *my* work is *his* work, and that *my* doctrine is *his*.

This, my friends, is a matter of great moment, and we would do well to take it along with us in our perusal of the sacred record.

There are a few who, flattering themselves (and they do nothing but flatter themselves when they imagine,) that they have reduced Jesus Christ to the condition of a mere man, think that they may treat him with the greater freedom, and dispose of his doctrine and of his character as their reason may dictate, or their fancy suggest. But the fallacy of this is obvious, even conceding to them that Christ was a mere man. For either he was a prophet, or he was not a prophet. If he was not a prophet, then we have no divine revelation, and the Gospel is a human invention, which we may adopt or reject as we have a mind. If, however, he *was* a prophet, then we are bound to believe—not some things, but every thing that he taught respecting himself, and God, and faith, and duty—unless,

indeed, we can suppose that God would permit his messenger to deceive us while it was impossible for us to discover the deception ; an idea which, as it respects the Almighty, is utterly unworthy and impious, and as it respects Christianity, would render it no revelation at all.

There are some again, who admit the doctrine of Christ's divinity, or at least attach so much dignity to his character, that they feel the highest reverence for all that he uttered, but do not transfer any great portion of that reverence to the teaching of his apostles. They venerate the discourses, and the conduct, and the works of Christ, as these are recorded by the Evangelists, but think themselves entitled, if not to deny absolutely many parts of the Epistles, at least to controvert and criticise them with considerable freedom, or to treat them with comparative neglect. The error of such persons is, in principle, the same with what we have already pointed out, and is to be put down by the same mode of argument. Either the authors of the Epistles were inspired, or they were not inspired. If they

were not inspired, then all that they have handed down to us in the way of doctrine is nothing better than the production of beings like ourselves ; it has no claim on our submission more than its own intrinsic reasonableness may secure for it—of which every individual must judge for himself ; and in that case, you must be prepared to throw away, as entirely destitute of authority, a great proportion of the Scriptures ; and not only so, but to throw away in this manner, the writings of some of those very men, through whose testimony and labours, there has been preserved for you that history of Christ which you profess to regard with so much reverence. If, on the other hand, they *were* inspired, then surely that which they committed to writing under the impulse of inspiration, instead of being treated as a mere human composition, deserves to be treated as a divine declaration—since those by whom it was penned, spake and indited as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

There is no medium in a case of this kind. It is not possible to be neutral ; or to

go partly to the one side, and partly to the other—and yet to act reasonably and consistently. Whenever you allow yourselves to believe that any part of the message which the prophets and apostles of God have delivered, proceeds from themselves independently of him; or that, by being conveyed to you through their instrumentality, it loses one particle of that truth and importance which it originally possessed—that moment you give up the doctrine of a divine revelation altogether, and throw yourselves upon the mercy of every fanciful theory, and every infidel suggestion. I know you will shudder at this dreadful alternative, and not only profess, but feel, the greatest anxiety to avoid it. Now, this is the very thing to which I would bring you. I would have our Saviour's statement deeply and indelibly engraven on your mind. I would have you to understand it, to believe it, to remember it, and to act upon it. Never for a moment suppose, that because the language which our Saviour and his apostles uttered, was uttered by beings in the same

form, and of the same nature with ourselves, we are therefore at liberty to hear it with any portion of indifference or contempt. Satisfied that they were appointed by the Almighty to declare to us "the things that belong to our peace," let their declarations be received with all the deference, and with all the submission, which are due to the Sovereign of the Universe.

2. Let us now, *secondly*, attend for a little to the consequence of rejecting Christ as it is here stated. "And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him at the last day."

Here we have, on the one hand, the grace and condescension of Christ; and, on the other, his justice and majesty, represented to us in plain and striking terms. "If any man," says Christ, "is made acquainted with my doctrine, and does not put his

faith in me, he acts a criminal and a fatal part. He has evidence sufficient to convince him that I am what I pretend to be; nothing prevents him from having such a conviction but his own guilty passions and unholy prejudices; his rejection of me, therefore, is highly sinful, and deserves the severest punishment. And yet I do not what I might in equity do—execute upon him immediate judgment. I offer myself to him in a far different character. I have come, not to condemn the world, but to save it from condemnation. I have been reproached, and persecuted, and rejected—still I hold out overtures of grace, and would have my bitterest enemies to come unto me, that they may never perish. But it will not—it cannot always be so. Let not those to whom I am long-suffering and tenderly compassionate—let them not conclude that they shall finally escape my righteous displeasure, if they continue obstinately to despise my great salvation—if they live and die in impenitence and unbelief. The period is approaching when I shall sit

down on the throne of judgment—call them to a strict account—decide upon their conduct and their fate, by the reception they have given to my word, which is the word of God, and “punish them with everlasting destruction, because they have not known God, and obeyed the Gospel of his Son.”

Ah ! my friends, what an awful and affecting prospect ! “After death cometh the judgment.” “You must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” And out of this book you must be acquitted or condemned. Are any of you living in contempt or in neglect of the word and doctrine of Christ ? Amidst all your attainments in knowledge, do you feel no desire, and are you making no endeavour to become acquainted with the contents of this sacred volume ? Or, knowing what it contains, do you reject its testimony concerning him, who is the Son of God and the Saviour of sinners ? Or, feeling your minds overpowered by the weight of evidence which has been made to bear upon them in favour of Christ’s mission, has

this evidence produced no more than speculative belief, and are your heart and conduct still unaffected by a Redeemer's grace? O, reflect, ere it be too late, on the aggravated guilt with which in this case you are chargeable. Christ comes invested with all the authority of Jehovah; but on that authority you deliberately trample. He comes to you in all the charms of pity and kindness; but you steel your hearts against the impressions of his matchless love. He comes to you bringing an everlasting and divine salvation; but to that salvation, so glorious and so great, you prefer the grovelling, the momentary, the pernicious pleasures of sin. He comes to you with invitations and remonstrances, with promises and threatenings—beseeching you, by his tears, his groans, and his blood, to flee from the wrath to come, and take refuge under the shadow of his cross, till the indignation be overpast—but to all that he says to you, you turn a deaf ear, and on all that he has done for you, you look with indifference

or with scorn. And what must be the consequence, if this ungrateful, this undutiful, this rebellious conduct be persisted in? I should say enough to alarm you, if I merely answered, that having rejected the Saviour, you must of course suffer the punishment which the law denounces against its transgressors, and from which he came and offered to save you. But it is nothing more than faithful to add, that you must suffer more. Your guilt is aggravated, by having salvation in your power ;—by having it pressed upon you in the most awful and in the most affectionate manner ; and, after all, disdaining to accept of it, because you wished to live in sin :—aggravated, therefore, must be the miseries to which your final impenitence shall doom you in a future and eternal world.

But I would turn your eye from this terrible prospect, and direct it to the Lord Jesus Christ, who came not to condemn sinners, but to save them. You are still in the land of the living, and in the place of hope. With respect to you, therefore,

Christ is not yet on his throne of judgment, ready to "give you according to your works." He is still on the mercy-seat of intercession. The fountain which he opened up for sin and for uncleanness is still flowing to cleanse and to heal the souls of the penitent. He will cast out none that apply to him for redemption. His grace and strength are adequate to all your wants, and to all your wishes. "Turn ye, therefore, turn ye, for why will ye die?" Embrace Christ as he is held out to you; trust in him with your whole heart; cling to him as your strong hold, and "there shall be no condemnation to you," either in this world, or in that which is to come.

3. In the *last* place, consider what will be the consequence of your receiving Christ. "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness."—"And I know that his commandment is life everlasting."

We are frequently represented in Scripture as in a state of darkness: That is to

say, our condition, in a spiritual sense, resembles the condition of those who have no light in a natural sense. Being in darkness is a figurative description of our ignorance of divine things, our moral pollution, our want of real comfort, and our danger of final ruin. This is the original situation of every one of us, and in this situation, if left to ourselves, we should have continued for ever. Nor is it to be supposed, that, because we are not so ignorant, nor so unholy, nor so miserable as the heathen, to whom the Gospel has never been imparted, we are therefore no longer subject to those evils which the term "darkness" is here employed to denote. It is very possible, and, alas ! too frequently realized, that with all the advantages of revelation, we live as if the blessing had not been conveyed—that we be in darkness, though light has been made to shine upon us from heaven. The reason of this is assigned by our Saviour. It is because we do not believe. "Light has come into the world, and we choose the darkness ra-

ther than the light." We do not permit the light to penetrate into our hearts. We do not receive it with that cordiality which is requisite. We do not feel our absolute need of it. And we will not apply it to those important purposes for which it is designed and sent. We cannot help perceiving it in some measure, and we cannot help making some use of it. But we do not love it, and therefore shut our eyes against its saving influences. In plain language, though many are the advantages which externally, and as to this world, we derive from the Gospel of Christ, yet so long as we do not receive him in faith and love, our souls in reality, and as to spiritual and eternal things, remain as destitute and as wretched as ever.

But believe in Christ ; deeply impressed with a conviction of your need of him, and of his suitableness to your necessities, take him, apply to him, follow him, as the light whom God has sent into the world ; and you " shall not any more abide in darkness, but shall have the light of life." The

gloom in which you are involved, as sinners, will be dispelled, and “the Sun of righteousness will shine upon you with healing in his beams,”—to lead you into the enjoyment of all the blessings which hitherto you either have not known, or have not been able to acquire, or have not been qualified to relish. Light is an emblem of knowledge :—believe in Christ, and he will communicate to you that knowledge which embraces the character of God—the condition and the duty of man, and maketh “wise even unto salvation.”—Light is an emblem of purity :—believe in Christ, and he will purify you “from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit,” and make you “holy, even as he himself is holy.”—Light is an emblem of safety :—believe in Christ, and you shall be safe from the greatest of all dangers—that of “the second death ;” for he has satisfied the law, removed its curse, and reconciled you to God.—Light is an emblem of happiness ;—believe in Christ, and you shall have “peace and joy in believing ;” you shall have “everlasting

consolation and good hope through grace ;” even in the midst of tribulation and sorrow you shall be enabled to rejoice. And the blessedness which you shall thus experience is not confined to a present world. What you enjoy here is but a small portion—an imperfect foretaste of it. There is a world beyond this, where it shall be felt in all its purity, in all its rapture, and in all its fulness ; and where it shall never be interrupted, and never come to an end. “ I know,” says Christ, “ that his commandment is life everlasting.” The ultimate object of Christ’s mission is to make you perfectly and eternally happy. Believe on him, therefore, as God has presented him in the Gospel ; follow and obey him in all that he requires of you ; and it is the unchangeable purpose and work of Him, who is “ the same yesterday, to-day and for ever,” that when you have been guided through the difficulties and dangers of this troubled scene, you shall enter at last into the bliss and the glories of immortality.

This, my friends, is the consequence of

receiving Christ as your Saviour. Let me beseech you to meditate often upon the happy effects of a faithful and cordial reception of him who is "the light of the world." And let the contemplation of these determine you to give him that reception. If there be any truth in Christianity, then it is utterly impossible for you to be safe and happy without Christ. If there be any truth in Christianity, then this safety and this happiness are not to be secured without those regards to Christ which he requires of you. If there be any truth in Christianity, then as certainly as you believe in Christ, so certainly shall all be well with you in time and in eternity. "Believe, therefore, in the Lord Jesus Christ, that you may never perish, but may have everlasting life." Amen.

LECTURE VI.

LUKE vii. 18—23.

18. *And the disciples of John shewed him of all these things.—19. And John calling unto him two of his disciples, sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?—20. When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?—21. And in the same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits, and unto many that were blind he gave sight.—22. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.—23. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.*

OUR Saviour had performed some very striking miracles. And, in particular, he had healed the centurion of Capernaum's paralytic servant, without so much as see-

ing him, and restored the widow of Nain's only son to life, when they were carrying him out to his funeral. The effect of these, and especially of the latter, was to draw from the spectators an open and explicit acknowledgment of his divine mission. "They glorified God, saying, that a great prophet is risen up among us, and that God hath visited his people."

But the effect was not limited to the immediate scene of operation. We are told that the fame of Christ's miracles spread through the whole country, and excited universal attention. This was to be expected for several reasons.

1. In the *first* place, as these miracles seemed to manifest a supernatural degree of wisdom and power, the minds of spectators would naturally be filled with astonishment and awe; they would be so strongly affected with what they had seen or heard, that every other object almost would be excluded from their thoughts; and they would, of course, be eager to com-

municate to others, what had produced such a lively impression on themselves.

2. In the *second* place, those miracles were performed for the most benevolent purposes:—not to awaken surprise, nor to strike with terror, nor to serve some selfish end; but, to cure the diseased and to comfort the sorrowful. This imparted to them a character which could not fail to make them the subject of general conversation and earnest inquiry; because every person would feel it coming home, either to his experience or his sympathy. It was not the rumour of a dry fact which reached him, or which he had to detail—but of a fact displaying a species and a degree of mercy, which, if his own circumstances or those of his friends required it, was to be met with in no other quarter.

3. In the *third* place, the miracles of Christ were not of rare occurrence, which would have damped the curiosity of the people, by diminishing the hope of seeing

them exhibited, and given occasion for saying, that there was a deficiency in the power by which they were performed, or that they were nothing more than artifice and delusion; and thus prevented multitudes from bestowing upon them that regard which they would otherwise have been disposed to pay. They were frequent—liberal as to their number as well as to their nature—extending to all manner of diseases, infirmities, and distresses;—and, therefore, there would scarcely be a family that would not have some reason to apply for them in the expectation of important benefit. And,

4. In the *fourth* place, Christ did not limit his miracles to any particular class of the people. He had no respect of persons. It was enough that the individuals needed his assistance, and asked it. He did not give it to them because they were rich, and he did not withhold it from them because they were poor. He imparted it equally to the man of rank and authority, and to the

beggar by the way side. So that there was not an inhabitant of the country who might not consider him as a refuge, and who would not share in that interest which the report of his benevolent works was calculated to create.

It is evident from these circumstances, that the case must have happened as it is here represented, and that the Evangelist only relates what we should certainly have anticipated, when he tells us, that “this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judea, and throughout all the region round about.”

This circumstance is of no small importance, as a part of that presumptive evidence by which the truth of Christ’s mission is established. Had his miracles made no noise in the world—had they been seen or heard of only by a few—or had the account of them merely transpired after his departure, and when there was no longer a proper opportunity of examining their nature, and deciding upon their merits, the argument deducible from them would have

been extremely deficient, if not wholly inconclusive. But, as we have seen, they were much talked of; they were everywhere the theme of wonder and curiosity; multitudes had a material interest in ascertaining their truth or falsehood; occasion was afforded after occasion, on which they might be investigated with the utmost facility and success; and the enemies of Christ were thus challenged to employ all their skill and penetration in resolving his marvellous works into mere imposture. In this situation it may be considered as a matter of absolute certainty—if the Jews were constituted like other human beings—that the miracles of Christ *were* subjected to frequent, strict, and jealous scrutiny—that they were canvassed in every conceivable way—that not a single experiment was omitted, by which their genuineness might be determined,—that they passed through the ordeal of learning, and sagacity, and scepticism, and prejudice, and hostility—and that, had there been a single defect in them, that defect could not have failed to

be discovered and exposed. And yet, so far from its ever having been proved, or even broadly asserted, it was not so much as alleged or insinuated, that they were not real and indisputable miracles. It was never alleged, nor insinuated, that one of them had failed in its proposed effect. It was never alleged nor insinuated, that the least degree of artifice had been detected in any part of any one of all that were performed. There is not the slightest trace of any such thing in all the opposition that was given to Christ at the period to which we allude, or during the period which immediately succeeded. Such pretences, and such accusations, had no existence when it was most natural and most competent to bring them forward, and when most unquestionably they would have been adduced, had they not been deemed utterly groundless; and, therefore, their existence in later times cannot, in any fairness, invalidate the inference which we draw from the acquiescence of Christ's *enemies* in the reality of his miracles;

namely, that this acquiescence, taken in connection with the great publicity and extensive fame of those miracles, affords a strong and satisfactory presumption that they *were* miracles in the true and proper sense of that word, and consequently that they were sufficient proofs of a divine mission.

It was not to be supposed that John the Baptist's disciples would be indifferent to the reputation which Christ had acquired, and which was every day spreading wider and wider. Nor was it to be supposed that they would neglect to give their master the earliest notice of all that was passing with regard to Him with whom he had so near an affinity. John at this time was in prison, where he had been put for his boldness in reproving Herod the tetrarch; but his disciples either had freedom of access to him, or had so much courage as to resort to him with the intelligence, in which they conceived him to be interested. "The disciples of John," says the Evangelist, "shewed him of all these

things.” And it is farther stated, that the information which they gave him induced him to send two of them to Jesus, to ask of him a satisfactory reply to this question, “Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?”

He that should come, was a common phrase, at the time of Christ's appearance, for the Messiah. It seems to have been borrowed from the prophets—Habakkuk styling him “he that shall come,” and Daniel speaking of him as “coming with the clouds of heaven.” Indeed it was a very natural description of that person who was not only promised of God, and expected by them, but of whom they were taught to entertain the loftiest notions, and from whose arrival they were taught to look for the most important blessings. His coming was synonymous in their minds with all that is magnificent, and splendid, and happy. And it was the perpetual object of hope, and the frequent topic of conversation. The event, therefore, came to be used as an appellative; and, accordingly, we find Jesus represented by the Bap-

tist as "he who should come after him;" and the multitude sang praises to him as one who "came in the name of the Lord."

Different opinions have been held as to the purpose for which John the Baptist sent this message to Christ. Some have supposed that its object was to satisfy his disciples as to certain doubts which they entertained respecting Christ's Messiahship. But this we apprehend to be a mistake; because if they did not believe their own master's testimony concerning Christ, it was not likely that they would believe Christ's testimony concerning himself; because, as it was the rumour of Christ's miracles that occasioned the message, it must be evident that this would rather have strengthened and confirmed their faith in Christ, than so weakened it as to render an appeal to him necessary, in order to re-establish it; and, because it appears from the whole scope and tenour of the passage that the communication was between the *Baptist* and Christ, and that the disciples were no farther concerned in it, than as persons employed to carry a question, and return

with an answer. “Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard.”

Others have conjectured that John was anxious to satisfy his own mind on the same subject. But neither do we think this a correct view of the case : For the very essence of the Baptist's commission was to bear witness to Christ as the Messiah ; for this specific end he was gifted with inspiration, and otherwise endowed as a prophet ; he had actually given his testimony to this effect ; and that testimony was given not only from a divine impulse on his mind, but in immediate consequence of a sign from heaven, by which he was enabled to recognise Christ with certainty, and agreeably to which he proclaimed him as *the Lamb of God*, as *the Son of God*, as one to whom God had *not given the Spirit by measure* ;—in short, as Him who was to come—that is, in one word, as the *Messiah*. Now, it cannot be imagined that, after all this, and when Christ, instead of doing any thing to bely his testimony, had, by his miracles at this very time, done every thing

to honour and support it, the Baptist should have so far forgotten himself as now to doubt seriously of Christ's Messiahship ; or at any rate, that he should act so absurdly as to seek for satisfaction on that point, from the very person respecting whose mission and character his faith is alleged to have needed confirmation.

What then, it may be said, was the cause and import of the message ? The following seems to remove all difficulty from the subject. John had been employed as a harbinger to Christ. His was the honourable and distinguished office of " going before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just ;" " to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." This he had done in a certain measure, by preaching and administering the baptism of repentance. But instead of being permitted to go on in this work, Providence had suffered him to fall into the hands of his enemies, to be shut up in prison, and thus apparently rendered

incapable of executing the trust that had been committed to him as the Messiah's forerunner. During his captivity, Christ, whom he had introduced, was engaged in the active discharge of *his* public and official duties; he had called to him twelve illiterate fishermen, and employed *them* to preach his Gospel, and work miracles in its support;—he himself was exhibiting his divine power in doing works which filled all Judea with rumour and astonishment;—and he had but a little before, and at no great distance from where the Baptist was, even condescended to raise from the dead a person of no consideration in society, and of no consequence to his religion. And all this while *he* who had acted as his herald, who was a prophet, and zealous in his cause, was prevented, along with his disciples, who shared in the importance and merit which belonged to him, from taking any part in the great and good work that was going on. Nay, he was subjected to all the shame and hardships of captivity, without a single effort being made for his deliver-

ance, or any mark of attention being bestowed upon him, by a person to whose glory he had hitherto devoted, and was still willing to devote, his best services.

The natural tendency of these facts was, not to impair or destroy the Baptist's belief in Christ as the Messiah, but to offend his feelings—to sour and irritate his temper—to make him discontented with his own situation, or rather with the treatment he received from Christ—and to draw from him such a complaint as might both indicate the displeasure that he felt, and procure the redress that he desired. Accordingly, he sent his disciples to Christ with this question, “Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?” Is it possible that thou art the Messiah, and yet hast no regard for him who was sent to prepare thy way?—that every person, however mean, and inconsiderable, and unconnected with thee, should experience thy kindness, and that I, who have so many claims on thee, should be left to live or die, neglected, unnoticed, and op-

pressed? Is this consistent with that grace, and truth, and power, which must be considered as distinguishing features of the Messiah's character? Or, am I the only one in all Judea who am to derive no benefit from the exercise of these attributes with which thou art invested? Wilt thou not rescue me from my present useless and degraded state, and restore me to the place which I am entitled to hold, and to the duties I am appointed to perform, in thy kingdom? Or, must I be at length constrained to draw the conclusion that I have been deceived, that the long-expected Redeemer of Israel is not yet come, and that my hope of deliverance must rest upon another Messiah?

This seems to be the import and meaning of the question. And that it is so, appears not only from the considerations already suggested, but from the tenour of Christ's answer, and from the language which he afterwards held respecting John. He tells John's disciples to relate to their master what they had seen him do, and what

they had heard him say. He gave very striking demonstrations of his being the Messiah; and hence the inference was obvious, that whatever he had done, which the Baptist might think inconsistent with that character, was so only in appearance; that he knew best what it was expedient for one in John's circumstances to do and to suffer; that his seeming neglect of him was the dictate of wisdom, not the want of kindness; that the impatience which he had betrayed did not correspond with the faith which he possessed, and had so often declared; and that it would be well for him to beware of murmuring against the arrangements of *him* of whom he himself had said, "there cometh one after me mightier than I, the latchets of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose:" "He must increase, I must decrease." "Blessed, then, is he who shall not be offended in me," or scandalised by my conduct.—And, to corroborate this view of the subject—to shew that Christ intended these words to administer a rebuke to John for the discontentment

and reproach conveyed in his question, he proceeds immediately to guard the people who were standing by, and who doubtless understood his language in this sense, against any impressions it might make unfavourable to their confidence in the Baptist; and represents him as still an unwavering believer, a man of great integrity, and a true and distinguished prophet.

At the very time that John's disciples arrived with his message, Christ was in the act of performing miraculous cures. He healed many of those who were labouring under ordinary diseases or infirmities, and of those also who were afflicted with the more inveterate distempers to which human nature is liable. He restored sight to those who were destitute of that blessing; and he dispossessed those who were tormented with evil spirits. "In that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight." The answer, therefore, which Christ had it in his

power to send, was of the most complete and satisfactory kind. It was a simple narrative of facts, which the messengers themselves had an opportunity of witnessing, and which must have strongly impressed the Baptist's mind with respect for the character and authority of Christ; and having thus succeeded in establishing, or rather in illustrating, the truth of his Messiahship, it concluded with the practical application of the doctrine to the particular state and temper of mind which John had manifested. "Then Jesus answering, said unto them, Go your way and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the Gospel is preached; and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me."

This statement involves three separate arguments. 1. There is, *first*, The argument from miracles. Christ did works which no man could have done, except God had been with him. He exercised a power

over both the natural and the spiritual worlds, which necessarily implied either that he was himself a divine person, and had an inherent capacity of doing such things, or that he had an energy imparted to him by the Almighty, *enabling* him to do them. Both suppositions lead irresistibly to the conclusion, that his doctrine concerning his own mission, as well as concerning every thing else, was entitled to unlimited credit.

2. In the *second* place, there is the character which he exercised in preaching the Gospel to the poor. This operated as an argument for Christ's Messiahship, both because it was what should naturally have been expected to hold a conspicuous place in the official conduct of such a personage, and because while it corresponded with the nature of the Being from whom he professed to come, it was, at the same time, so contrary and so superior to the views and customs of every other teacher that had appeared among the Jews.

3. In the *third* place, the argument from

prophecy, though not expressly mentioned, is very plainly alluded to ; and indeed the language of Christ, as addressed to John and his disciples, must have been considered as mainly referring to that point. The Jews were in the habit of judging of Christ's pretensions to the Messiahship, not merely by his working miracles, which of itself only shewed him to be a prophet—but by the correspondence which they could discover between his character, his work, and his circumstances, and those predictions concerning the Messiah which were contained in their Scriptures. Now, in the present instance, those facts to which Christ directed the attention of the Baptist, while they were of themselves striking evidences of a divine mission, exhibited also a very exact and wonderful fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies, and thus were possessed of double force as grounds for believing that Jesus was the promised Messiah. It was foretold that he should work miracles ; and many of the very kind of miracles which are here said

to have been wrought by Christ, are specially mentioned by Isaiah in the 35th chapter of his prophecies, where, in speaking of the flourishing condition of the Messiah's kingdom, he says, "then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing." The same prophet explicitly and strongly states, that the Messiah should be occupied in proclaiming his message to the poor and humble. Nay, it is not unworthy of remark, that the very spirit which the Baptist displayed on this occasion, was pointed out by the prophets when speaking of the reception and treatment which the Messiah should experience in the world. "He shall be for a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence."—"Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form or comeli-

ness ; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him."

The great error which the Baptist committed, and for which he received this indirect but most intelligible reproof, consisted in not giving sufficient operation to his faith, and in not allowing this grand principle to have its proper effect in reconciling him to the will of Him in whom it was placed. The error, however, was not peculiar to John. It is a great deal too prevalent among ourselves. To many, even of those who are decidedly convinced of the truth of Christ's mission, he is, as predicted, in some respect or other, "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence." He requires their reception of certain doctrines, which they dislike ; he enjoins certain duties, which they are unwilling to perform ; he appoints certain sufferings, to which they cannot patiently submit ; and on these accounts they are apt to put some such mutinous and distrustful question as the Baptist's, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?"

If there be any such among my hearers, let me conjure you, for your own comfort and safety, to recollect the whole, and especially the concluding part of Christ's answer, "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me." You are convinced that Christ came from heaven; that he is the Son of God, and the only Saviour of men. And you are convinced of this on strong and immoveable ground. Such being the case, how absurd and inconsistent is it to be offended at any thing which he requires you to believe, to do, or to suffer—to set up your ignorance against his wisdom, and to oppose your own selfish views and feelings to his authoritative dispensations! He knows what is best for you, and can ordain nothing concerning you in which it is not proper and necessary for you to acquiesce. All his dealings with you are but portions of that scheme which he is following out, in order to promote your welfare, and secure your ultimate salvation. If you believe in him at all, you must believe this. So much so, indeed, that I can

perceive no middle course in which it is possible for you to move—no compromise in which it is possible for you to rest with safety. Either you must apostatise altogether, or you must, in conformity to the natural import and tendency of your faith, surrender yourselves entirely to the guidance and government of Christ—to be ruled by him, and to be saved by him, in his own way.

When, therefore, you are tempted to take offence at Christ, have immediate and confident recourse to the principle of faith. Let that be, in all such cases, the anchor of your souls. Remember that you have believed to the satisfaction of your own mind. Look again and again to those evidences by which it was, with the divine blessing, originally produced. Set them distinctly before you, that your faith may become more vivid and energetic. And pray fervently to God that he would “work it in you with power,” that by the influences of his spirit he would impart to it that clearness, that activity, that all prevailing strength, which

can be derived from no human source. Do this, and none of these things shall move you. Nothing that comes from Christ in the shape of doctrine, of duty, or of suffering, will then shock or distress you. His cross, which was to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness, and is to modern unbelievers the butt of ridicule, will be to you "the power of God and the wisdom of God," for your eternal salvation. You will "esteem all his commandments concerning all things to be right," and proceed with alacrity to do them. And when he sees proper to put you into the prison of trial and affliction, you will even "take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for his sake," satisfied that these are appointed in infinite wisdom and mercy, and that they will "work out for you a far more exceeding, even an eternal, weight of glory." Amen.

LECTURE VII.

LUKE vii. 24—35.

24. *And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind?—25. But what went ye out for to see?—A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously apparelled, and live delicately, are in kings' courts.—26. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet.—27. This is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.—28. For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.—29. And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John.—30. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.—31. And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like?—32. They are like unto children sitting in the market-place, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept.—33. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil.—34. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!—35. But wisdom is justified of all her children.*

IN our exposition of the preceding passage, we endeavoured to shew you, that the

question which the Baptist put to Jesus did not arise from any want of faith, but rather from a momentary fretfulness of temper. And, among several reasons for adopting this view, we referred to the first part of the context which we have just now read. Jesus concluded his answer by administering a rebuke to John for the angry message which he had sent by his disciples: and then, lest this should lessen the confidence and attachment of the people with respect to John, he proceeded to impress upon them just notions of his character, and to appeal to their own observation and experience.

“And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak to the people concerning John: What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?” Was it to see a person whose faith has been the sport of every temptation that assailed it, or whose testimony has been fluctuating and indecisive? No: his conviction has remained firm and unbending, amidst the prevailing infidelity

of his countrymen, and amidst the irksomeness and severity of his own sufferings. And his testimony to me as the Messiah has been marked with a character of boldness, consistency, and perseverance, which must render it peculiarly forcible and free from suspicion. My reproof, therefore, does not imply that John has for a moment ceased to believe in my Messiahship, or that he is really withdrawing the attestation to me in that capacity which he formerly gave. But it implies that he has allowed unwarrantable feelings to interfere with the proper tendencies of his faith; that he has not exercised a becoming acquiescence in my dispensations towards him; and that his conduct in this respect, by seeming to contradict what he has hitherto professed to hold concerning my mission, may have the effect of weakening the attachment of some, and preventing the belief of others. Be careful, then, to make the distinction: and while you perceive that he has committed an error, and have heard him rebuked for it, remember, at the same time,

that as a witness to me, his evidence continues strong and unequivocal as ever.

“ But what went ye out for to see ? A man clothed in soft raiment ? ” Was it a person living in ease and luxury—exposed to no want and no hardship, but enjoying every comfort and every pleasure that his heart could desire ? If this had been your object, you would have sought for him in the palaces of kings—not in the solitudes of a barren wilderness. Going out to the *wilderness*, therefore, you must have laid your account with seeing a man leading an austere and mortified life, denying himself to most of the gratifications in which other people indulge, suffering those privations and necessities which the scene of his labours imposed, and receiving no reward of an earthly kind on account of his painful and laborious services. And you were not disappointed. It was just such a person that you beheld in John the Baptist. And from his conduct and circumstances in the wilderness, where he “ had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about

his loins, and his meat was locusts and wild honey," it behoves you to infer, not only that *he* whose coming he proclaimed was to erect a spiritual rather than a temporal kingdom among men, but also that his testimony being given amidst so much self-denial and austerity, could only proceed from a mind strong in its own integrity, and that he who, in such an unfavourable situation, could persevere in his belief of my Messiahship, is not likely to have that belief shaken or overturned by any thing that has happened to him since, especially as he has so much more reason than before to conclude, that I am "*he who should come.*"

"But what went ye out for to see? A prophet?" Did not you expect to see a prophet? And did not he fulfil your expectations? All that he was—all that he said—and all that he did—impressed you with the conviction that he was a messenger from God. Of this you could perceive no reason to entertain a doubt. And let me assure you, that the indiscreet message

which he has sent me, and the rebuke which I have conveyed in my answer, ought not to alter or weaken your opinion of him in any measure. He is still a prophet; borne up in that character by all the evidence which has satisfied you hitherto. “Yea, I say unto you that he is much more than an ordinary prophet.” He himself is the subject of ancient prophecies; and he is particularly spoken of by Malachi as one who was to come in the spirit and power of Elijah, and to act the honourable and important part of introducing the Redeemer of Israel. “Behold,” says that prophet, “I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.” But besides that, his superiority is manifested by all the other leading circumstances of his condition. Miracles of a striking nature attended his entrance into the world. As soon as the gift of inspiration came upon him, he was favoured with clearer views of the nature of the Gospel dispensation than any of his predecessors enjoyed. He was honoured by being contem-

porary with the Messiah, by having him pointed out to his attention by a heavenly sign, and by being permitted to administer to him the rite of baptism. He was employed in ministrations which served to prepare the Jews for the reception of their expected deliverer. And these ministrations were attended with peculiar and unprecedented success among the very people who had been accustomed to treat divine messengers with the greatest indifference or cruelty. In all these respects, John has occupied a pre-eminent station among those inspired men whom providence has from time to time raised up for the edification of the church; and it were an act of great injustice to him, as well as most unreasonable and inconsistent in itself, to admit the supposition that he is giving way to serious doubts respecting a point on which he has not only every external reason to be satisfied, but on which his mind has been divinely enlightened, and most completely settled. If the other prophets were steady in their predictions—much more is

it to be maintained, that *his* faith and testimony remain in all their original vigour.

Such seems to be the import of Christ's address to the multitude on this occasion. As, however, he thought it necessary to caution them against drawing from his reproof any conclusions unfavourable to the more essential parts of John's character, which would have been productive of bad consequences to themselves, so he now seems desirous to vindicate himself for administering the reproof which he had sent—a vindication obviously suggested by the effect which his account of John was likely to have upon their minds. He therefore adds, “But he that is least in the kingdom of God, is greater than he”—that is, the very lowest of all those who are inspired to execute the office of a prophet under the more perfect dispensation of the Gospel, are greater in point of privileges, of functions, and of gifts, than he with all his advantages can possibly pretend to be. He has only seen the Messiah transiently—they have seen him daily, and have

had the best opportunities of becoming acquainted with his conduct and his doctrine. He only made preparation for the Messiah's kingdom—they are employed in its actual erection and advancement. He had not the Holy Ghost, and did no miracle—they are endowed with an extraordinary measure of the Spirit, and when they go forth to preach, “the Lord works with them, and confirms their words with signs following.”—Now, if he is inferior to the most imperfectly endowed of my disciples, and would of course have acted improperly, had he found fault with them in the discharge of their official duties, much more is his conduct reprehensible, when his discontent is felt and expressed at me, the great prophet who was to come into the world, and from whom he and all of them derived their authority,—the Head of the church,—the Lord from heaven, who am one with the Father, and all whose measures, therefore, must be directed by a wisdom that cannot err, as they are dictated by a goodness that knows no bounds.

Our Saviour goes on to state the very different reception which Christ met with from different classes of the Jews—from the people at large, including the publicans, on the one hand, and from the Pharisees and lawyers on the other. From the former, his reception was good—from the latter, it was bad. “And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptised with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being *not* baptised of him.” The common people and the publicans *justified God*, or approved of his wisdom and justice in appointing John to that office which he fulfilled, and in commissioning him to preach that doctrine which he so strenuously inculcated; and, as a proof of their approbation, they practically acquiesced in that doctrine, and cheerfully submitted to the baptism of repentance—thus qualifying themselves for becoming subjects of the Messiah’s kingdom. The Pharisees and lawyers, on the contrary, rejected—openly and obstinately

rejected—the plan which God had instituted for their advantage. He had called them to repentance by the ministry of John, but they refused to obey the call; they would not be baptized by him with that view; they could not, therefore, embrace the Messiah; and, consequently, they continued in their former state of guilt and danger.

The two classes of the Jews of whom our Saviour here speaks, had each its peculiar character, which it may be proper to attend to. Those by whom John was received, were “the people and the publicans;” the *people*—the multitude whose attainments in religion and knowledge were inconsiderable, who made no pretensions to superiority in these respects, and who were habitually despised by the more learned and eminent of their countrymen; and the *publicans* or tax-gathers—persons who were employed by the Roman government to levy tribute from the Jews, who were extremely obnoxious to that nation, because their office indicated subjection to a foreign and

heathen yoke; and whose office being thus exceedingly odious, was either accepted of only by such as had little character to lose, or actually produced that want of moral respectability which it was supposed to imply.

Those, again, by whom John was rejected, were “the Pharisees and lawyers;”—the *Pharisees*, who were characterized by a lofty opinion of themselves, and a supercilious and intolerable contempt for others; who had no vital godliness, but a great deal of scrupulosity about the forms and ceremonies of religion; who, in short, were gross hypocrites, and frustrated the divine law, by substituting in its place, or at least by loading it with the unauthorised, fanciful, and unholy, traditions of the elders:—and the *lawyers* or scribes, who for the most part belonged to the sect of the Pharisees, and were distinguished from the rest by their literary profession, and the official stations to which their learning had raised them—being peculiarly skilled in the divinity prevalent among the Jews, and

being either judges in their sanhedrim, or teachers in their schools and synagogues—but still employing their talents, their knowledge, and their influence, in perverting the sacred record, and in setting up human folly in opposition to divine wisdom.

Now, in considering the contrast which our Saviour here draws between the people and publicans on the one side, and the Pharisees and lawyers on the other, as to their reception of John the Baptist, and, through that medium, of the Gospel itself, it is proper that we attend carefully to his meaning, that we may at once avoid dangerous error, and receive sound instruction.—For this purpose, we observe,

1. In the *first* place, that our Saviour gives no countenance by this contrast to the vices and profligacy of the first class that he mentions. He commends them for submitting to the doctrine and baptism of John; and he holds them out as objects of greater admiration and praise, because they had formerly been so openly wicked as to

be regarded by others with abhorrence and contempt. But then his approbation has no reference at all to the freedom and publicity with which they had committed sin. It is confined to the change which their conduct had undergone ; and this presupposes a decided condemnation of the character which they had hitherto maintained, but which they had now completely abandoned. Their notorious irreligion and licentiousness are brought forward, in order to sharpen the reproach which is directed against the Pharisees and lawyers, who were hypocrites, who persevered in their hypocrisy, and whose hypocrisy was one cause of their refusing to be baptized unto repentance. Here are men who were abandoned in no ordinary degree, and from whom the Pharisees turned away with the utmost aversion, yet humbly submitting, in their reception of John the Baptist, to the appointment of that God whom they had hitherto disobeyed ; while the Pharisees, who pretended to know the will of God, and to do it, rejected the claims of the

Baptist, and despised his ministrations, though accompanied with divine authority. But while this is the object which our Saviour evidently has in view, it cannot be imagined that he means to speak with any the least indulgence of the iniquities and impieties from which the people and the publicans had been rescued. This would be contrary to every feature of his character, every part of his doctrine, and every end of his mission. And, indeed, he could not here, as has been already hinted, speak of their penitence in terms of applause, without necessarily reprobating the offences of which it was their happiness to have repented.

I offer these remarks to meet the error of those who abuse the language of our Saviour, in this and other passages, so far as to encourage themselves in sin. We find some who seem to think that their conduct cannot be bad, if it be but frank and open—that if they are only not hypocrites, they are all that can or will be required. When charged with any deed of impiety or wick-

edness, they confess their fault, but take credit to themselves for honest dealing, and because they are not like some other people, who pretend to a sanctity which they do not possess, and because they can can boast of breaking God's law with a high hand, boldly arrogate that praise, which is due only to substantial worth. Nothing can be more preposterous and absurd than this. Granting that these persons were less guilty, and more easily reclaimed than false and self-righteous professors, still what a paltry question is that with creatures who have sinned ; and what a dangerous superiority is it to be satisfied with, as any ground of confidence or hope ! The more aggravated guilt, and the more imminent peril of our neighbours, will not atone for *our* offences, or exempt us from the obligations which our sinfulness imposes. We have our own situation to attend to ; we have our own account to give ; we have our own salvation to work out ; we have our own duty to perform. And except we repent and believe the gospel—except we lay down

the weapons of our rebellion, and flee for refuge to the Almighty Saviour of the world, we cannot obtain mercy, but must perish in our sins.

2. We observe, in the *second* place, that our Saviour carefully warns us against hypocrisy and self-righteousness. The Pharisees and lawyers assumed a religious character; they professed a great deal of pious zeal; they were punctual in their observance of ritual institutions; and, in this respect, did many things more than the law prescribed. They had acquired, by these means, a great reputation for devotion, and were so much accustomed to look with complacency on their own attainments, that they did not perceive the necessity of a righteousness different from, or better than that which they already possessed; and, consequently, neither the doctrine of John, nor that of Christ, was acceptable to them, but rather the object of their hatred and contempt. They flattered themselves that they had nothing to repent of, and

no occasion to confide in the merits of another.

This was their conduct, and it ended in their destruction. While publicans and sinners were awakened by the ministry of the Gospel, and embraced the redemption which it offered as perfectly suited to their case—*they* slept on, wrapt up in their own sufficiency—thinking themselves something, when in fact they were nothing—glorying in their privileges, when in truth they were far from the kingdom of heaven—satisfied with the praise of men, when they had not the approbation of God—and all the while dreaming of safety, though sinking into ruin.

Nothing tends so much to blind the understanding and harden the heart against the influence of evangelical truth, as that temper which distinguished the Pharisees. The Gospel is addressed to those only who are guilty, helpless, and undone. And it is necessary for all men, because all men are in that state. But if we are not conscious of guilt, which requires an atonement for its

expiation ; if we do not feel a corruption which needs to be removed by divine power ; if we are not sensible of habits both of mind and conduct, which must be forsaken ; if we are not aware of the danger in which sin has involved us, and of our own inability to secure our deliverance ; what motive can we have for applying to the Gospel ? How is it possible for us to understand its meaning, or to derive any benefit from its plan and its provisions ? All the wisdom which it exhibits, all the grace which it displays, all the power with which it operates, will be of no avail to us, so long as we continue to think ourselves “ rich and increased in goods, and standing in need of nothing.” And without an interest in the blessings of the Gospel, we are “ without God and without hope.” Having sinned, and neglecting the means of recovery that are provided, we cannot escape the punishment to which sinners are doomed.

As we value the salvation of our souls, then, let us entertain humble views of our-

selves. Let us frequently examine our hearts and our character. Let us judge of our moral state, not by the opinions of our fellow men, nor by any standard of our own creation, but by the unerring standard of the divine law. And let us surrender our minds to those deeply abasing impressions, which such inquiries, if candidly conducted, will infallibly produce. Let us reflect often, and seriously, on the number of our transgressions, and on the aggravations with which they have been accompanied; on that worldly mindedness which has so often kept our thoughts from rising to heaven; on that want of spirituality in our views, and of purity in our motives, which has in so many instances rendered our conduct unworthy; on those sins and imperfections which have always mingled with the very best of our services; on that facility in yielding to temptation of which we must be perpetually conscious,—let us reflect often and seriously on all these things, that we may become more and more convinced of the necessity of repenting and being con-

verted, of depending for justification on the atonement and righteousness of Christ, and of applying for the enlightening, the renewing, and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit.

Our Saviour next reproves the Jews who rejected him and his forerunner, for the perversity which their conduct displayed, and illustrates it by the following comparison, ver. 31. "Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the market-place, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not lamented." The Jews at their feasts had joyful music, accompanied with dancing; and at their funerals they had melancholy music, accompanied with the lamentations of hired mourners. This was imitated by the children, and formed by them into a regular entertainment. And when one party of them, happening to become peevish and discontented, did not answer to those who

performed the musical part, by dancing or lamentation, the latter naturally made the complaint here mentioned, and this gradually coming into proverbial use, was at length applied to all who had exhibited a similar temper. It is here applied to the Jews, who, in their treatment of John and Jesus, exhibited all the frowardness of these children. Providence employed various methods for converting them; but to every one of these they found a ready objection, and to none of them would they yield. “John the Baptist,” says Christ, “came neither eating bread nor drinking wine,”—he came in all the sternness and austerity of your ancient prophets—and you reject *him*, alleging that he is under the influence of a demon that hates the society of men, and that can dwell only in a desert. “The Son of Man is come” in a different form, and with opposite manners—he comes “eating and drinking,” indulging in the innocent enjoyments of life—associating familiarly with all classes of the people—and though strictly temperate, not refu-

sing the kindness of hospitality, or the pleasures of social intercourse. But you reject him also; and say that he is "a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." This conduct is most unreasonable. It can only proceed from a determination not to be satisfied with any method of treatment that may be adopted. And it must terminate in a forfeiture of all the blessings which acquiescence in the divine appointments alone can secure. "But wisdom is justified of all her children." They who are actuated by the principles of *genuine* wisdom, far from seeking for pretences, or indulging in exaggerations, in order to vindicate their opposition to the will of heaven, will see, and admire, and submit to that variety which Providence employs for their instruction and advantage. They will perceive and acknowledge, that the difference in our habits and manners corresponds exactly with the purposes for which we respectively appear. And, under that impression, they are "baptized with the baptism of John,"

and enter into the kingdom of the Son of Man.

This, my friends, conveys an important and useful lesson to all of you. The great object of our ministrations is to promote your eternal redemption, by leading you to the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Redeemer. Various means are employed for accomplishing that most desirable purpose. To some of these you may discover objections; but the objections originate in ignorance, or corruption, or fretfulness, and not in any real inadequacy in their own nature. Being appointed of him who cannot err, and calculated to promote the object in view, it is your duty and your interest to acquiesce in the practical use and application of them. Be jealous of yourselves,—may be sure that you are wrong, when you begin to question the propriety or the efficacy of what comes from God. And whether we, acting faithfully as the servants of Christ, illustrate doctrine or inculcate duty—whether we dissuade from vice or exhort to virtue—whether we urge

upon you the commandments or the ordinances of the Lord—whether we administer reproof or encouragement—whether we allure by mercy or persuade by terror—whether we exhibit to you the rewards of heaven or the punishments of hell—we are doing all this in the name, and by the authority, and after the example of our great Master;—and it will be your wisdom to profit by every means to which he has given his sanction—because it is in this way only that you can hope to obtain the salvation which he has promised.

LECTURE VIII.

LUKE vii. 36—50.

36. *And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.—37. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster-box of ointment,—38. And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.—39. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him, saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him ; for she is a sinner.—40. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have something to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.—41. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors : the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty :—42. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most ?—43. Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.—44. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman ? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet : but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.—45. Thou gavest me no kiss : but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet.—46. Mine head with oil thou didst not anoint : but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.—47. Wherefore, I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven ; for*

she loved much : but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.—48. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.—49. And they that sat at meat with him, began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?—50. And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee ; go in peace.

It is not easy to determine the precise motives by which the Pharisee was actuated when he invited Jesus to partake of his hospitality. When we consider the principles and character of his sect, and the offence which Christ had given them by his faithful exposition of their errors, it can scarcely be supposed that his views were very generous or pure. It is most probable, that his intention was to watch the language and conduct of Christ more narrowly than he could have done in other circumstances; to ensnare him, if possible, into statements or actions which would be obnoxious to the Jews; and thus to have it in his power to represent him as one who deserved the severest treatment that they could inflict upon him. If this was the case, Jesus might, with propriety, have refused the invitation, and entrusted himself with

those who would act with more friendship and sincerity. But his own safety and reputation were never his chief concern. It was the ruling desire of his heart, and the constant pursuit of his life, to do good. And for the attainment of this end, he often put himself into situations, which less benevolence or less fortitude than he possessed would have led him to avoid. He associated with publicans and sinners, though he thereby exposed his good name to the attacks of calumny. He entered under the roof of his most inveterate enemies, though he thereby endangered his liberty and his life. He sat down in the company and at the table of this malicious and hypocritical Pharisee, though he was thereby to give him a handle, which he had every inclination to employ, for his destruction. He did all this, because it afforded him opportunities of being useful, even to his adversaries, in promoting their temporal comfort, and their spiritual advantage.

This is an example which it becomes us to imitate as far as circumstances will per-

mit. The duty, indeed, must be modified according to the difference of our character and situation from those of Christ. Still, however, it is a duty to do good as we have opportunity—to mingle with the world in a certain degree, that we may enjoy that opportunity—not to be intimidated by the mere risk of giving offence, or of being slandered, or even of suffering greater inconveniences than these—but wherever a fair field of usefulness offers itself, to enter upon it with resolution, activity, and zeal. Prudence, indeed, both as to our personal comfort, and the interests of the cause we undertake, should ever direct our proceedings; not that prudence, however, which shrinks into cowardice, or degenerates into selfishness—which extinguishes the flame of charity, and will not allow us to do a great and certain good, lest we should do an inconsiderable and contingent evil. It must be that prudence only which leaves the essential animating principle entire—which does nothing more than regulate its movements and operations, so as to

render it more efficient—which lops off the more luxuriant and unproductive branches from the plant, that those which remain may grow more vigorously, and produce more abundantly—which leads us to take a comprehensive view of the work we have to perform, and not to sacrifice the whole by an injudicious attention to one part, nor, by a single rash and unadvised effort, to destroy our means of continued and more extended usefulness. This is the prudence which ought always to guide us; because it will guide us to what is right without supplanting the more active and enthusiastic virtues. But with the example of Christ before our eyes, we ought never to forget, that, as often as benevolence prompts and duty calls, we must be ready to undergo labour and incur hazard, and even to place ourselves, without any safeguard but the consciousness of rectitude, in the midst of a convention of Pharisees, from whom we may expect to receive no other reward for our services than mockery and malice.

Let us now consider, *first*, The character, conduct, and condition of the woman here spoken of; *secondly*, The behaviour of the Pharisee; and, *thirdly*, The treatment which Christ gave to both.

I. The woman, it is said, “was a sinner.” We are not told of the particular vices to which she was addicted; but the name *sinner* is usually employed by the Evangelists to denote a high and marked degree of moral turpitude. So that she may be justly considered as one who had thrown off the fear of God,—abandoned the paths of virtue,—given herself over to the delusions of a vain world, and the dominion of a depraved heart,—and made an open sacrifice both of her conscience and her reputation. She was arrested, however, in her career of guilt and folly. Conviction was awakened in her mind. She became sensible of her sinful and miserable state. Regret and sorrow took possession of her soul. The invitation of Christ to the weary and heavy laden forbade her to

despair. In the exercise of humility, penitence, and faith, she fled to him, and took refuge in his grace and power; and her application met with all that condescension and kindness which characterised the Saviour of the world. She heard from his lips the blessed declarations of forgiveness. She received from him the spiritual comfort he knew so well to impart. She experienced at his bidding that peace to which she had been hitherto a stranger; and returned to the path of holiness and piety, "rejoicing in the Lord Jesus Christ," who had saved her from her sins, and made her the child of God.

Ah! my friends, there is no real happiness to those who are living in sin. It has its pleasures, indeed; but these are degrading, short lived, and unsatisfactory. Remorse plants a sting in every one of them; and, as the termination of life approaches, they give place to bitter reflection on what is past, and alarming anticipations of what is to come. Thoughtless worldlings, who run for ever in the round

of idle amusements, or indulge, at will, in the feast of forbidden joys, will not receive this doctrine. They feel delighted with the course they are pursuing, and refuse to listen to us when we tell them that their state is miserable. To them our language is what they choose to term canting; our religion is, in their estimation, a system of gloom and melancholy; and our only object, they allege, is to deprive them of gratifications, which we ourselves have not spirit enough to taste, or sensibility enough to relish. So have thousands thought and said when youth was warm, and the world smiling, and the current of joy flowing strong and rapid; but, in the hour of calm reflection, in the season of adversity, or on the bed of death, was it ever known that any of them spoke of their former conduct with approbation, or recommended to their friends a life of licentiousness as a life of happiness? O, no! But have not confessions innumerable and instructive illustrated the truth of God, when he declares, that “there is no peace to the wicked?”

Is it not impossible, in the very nature of things, that they who have placed themselves at a distance from the fountain of all good, should enjoy any portion of real and substantial felicity? Is it not necessary, that the actions, against which God has directed his threatenings and his displeasure, should produce no solid comfort, no permanent advantage?—that those flowers of delight, which he has forbidden us to touch, should wither in our grasp?—that disappointment, and weariness, and disgust, should attend us at every step of that path from which the light of his countenance is withdrawn?—and that his wrath should kindle and consume us, when the day of our probation is over, and the measure of our iniquity full? Why, then, ye votaries of sin! O! why will you persevere in its thankless and miserable service? Why will you continue to drink of a cup which contains nothing but delusion and death? “Arise ye, and depart, for this is not your rest.” Abandon, as this once unfortunate woman did, those walks of vanity and vice in

which you have heretofore lingered, “seeking rest and finding none.” And aspire after the Divine favour, in which alone is life, and from which alone true happiness can be derived; and you shall find, as she did, a peace which the world can neither give nor take away. Do not flatter yourselves with the idea, that you are not so wicked as she may justly be supposed to have been. God only knows. But, at any rate, degrees of guilt are not a proper subject of inquiry for you in such a case; and, though the result of the inquiry were favourable, it is no ground of confidence or self gratulation. She was a sinner, and you are sinners. Sin had no comfort for her, and it can have none for you. She forsook it, and became happy; do you also forsake it, and you also shall be happy.

You have the same encouragement that she had; and that encouragement is to be found in the sufficiency of Christ, who is “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” Your course of disobedience may have been long,—your transgressions may have been

numerous and aggravated,—and you may be ready to conclude, that your guilt is too great to be pardoned by that God, who is “of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.” But he who said to this sinful woman, “Thy sins are forgiven—go in peace,” is able and willing, as he then was, to “save to the very uttermost every one that comes unto God through him.” For the very chief of sinners he came into the world; and his “blood cleanseth from all sin.” None, therefore, has any reason to despond. No, my friends! ye in whose nature the disease of sin has taken deepest root, and is become most inveterate and severe, even to you I can hold out encouragement to hope. There is balm in Gilead suited to your case; there is a Physician for you there whose skill is consummate, and whose virtue is omnipotent. Your conscience may write the bitterest things against you, and speak nothing but terror and death. But I tell you of a Saviour who has blotted out the handwriting, and proclaims with a voice of authority and grace, that even for you there

is pardon, and reconciliation, and eternal life. “Why, then, should your soul be cast down, and why should it be disquieted within you?”

But, while you beware of despondency, beware also of presumption. It is not enough that God is merciful, and that Jesus is an appointed and qualified Redeemer. You must have the dispositions that become your situation, and the principles that are suitable to the blessings which you need and desire. This woman shed the tears of penitential sorrow, and reposed her confidence in him from whom she expected salvation. And, in like manner, you must repent and believe that you may be saved. Seeing yourselves utterly lost, if abandoned to your own wisdom and your own strength, you must take refuge in the Lord Jesus, and rely upon him as your wisdom, your righteousness, your sanctification, your redemption. And as he came to save you *from* your sins, there is no hope for you while you continue *in* your sins. “Repent, then, and be converted, that your

sins may be blotted out." Let it be your earnest desire that you may be delivered not only from punishment, but also from corruption. Seek for happiness by striving to be holy. Apply to Jesus that you may be sanctified by his Spirit, as well as justified by his obedience. And having "escaped the pollutions of the world," see that you return to them no more.

II. We now consider, as we proposed, the behaviour of the Pharisee.

The Pharisee, no doubt, had heard from sufficient testimony, or witnessed with his own eyes, many things which ought to have convinced him, beyond all controversy, that Christ was a prophet. Probably he was satisfied, in a speculative way, that the evidence for Christ's prophetic mission was irresistible. But he was, at the same time, anxious to get quit of it, because the conclusions to which it naturally led, did not correspond with the mistaken notions and corrupt principles which he was otherwise disposed to maintain. He, therefore, eager-

ly laid hold of an incident which occurred on this occasion, to justify him in his unbelief,—an incident which, had not his mind been completely clouded with prejudice, would have produced no impression on it whatever. “Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him, saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known, who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him, for she is a sinner.” That is to say, “This woman is so notorious a sinner, that her very touch must defile him; if he were a good man, he would have carefully avoided it; and if he had been a prophet, he would have known her character, so as to have kept her at a distance.” The Pharisee’s inference, therefore, was either that Christ had no regard to moral purity, or that he had not that divine knowledge which belonged to a true prophet.

The absurdity of such reasoning is obvious, for it goes on the supposition that this woman was not a penitent, or that Christ was to do good, not to sinners, but to the

righteous only, or that Simon the Pharisee knew all the circumstances of the case better than Christ, of whom he chose to constitute himself the unerring judge. This, however, is just the sort of reasoning that we are often doomed to hear, respecting the conduct and the doctrine of Christ. Although he has given the strongest and most indubitable proofs of his divine mission, yet many who cannot refuse to acknowledge this, will, in the pride of their understanding, or of their heart, object to certain things as unnecessary, unreasonable, or impracticable; and will only take his Gospel with such qualifications as may render it suitable to their own previous views and wishes.—Let us, my friends, beware of such conduct. It is absurd; for while it admits that Christ actually came from God, it decides upon his religion as if he came from man. It is impious; for it sets up human opinions against the dictates of the Almighty. And it is dangerous, for by receiving Christ in our own way, it of

course rejects him in that way in which he is revealed for our eternal salvation.

We remark, farther, that the Pharisee did not treat Christ with that hospitality which was virtually promised in the invitation that he gave him to come into his house, and eat with him. He neglected those tokens of kindness and respect which were usually paid to the friends or the strangers whom he entertained, and which were due, in a particular manner, to a guest so worthy and illustrious as the one who now honoured him with his presence. He did not give him water to bathe his feet, which was a practice equally common and useful in the case of travellers. He did not give him the ordinary salutation of a kiss to assure him of a welcome, and to mark the confidence which he might repose in his friendship. He did not anoint his head with oil, a ceremony which was observed at almost every entertainment. He did none of these things;—from a fear, perhaps, that his brethren of the Pharisees, who were with him, might suspect him of

being too much devoted to the comfort and interests of a person so obnoxious to them as Christ; or, perhaps, from that self-righteous spirit, which led him to regard the services of Christ as a prophet as equally unnecessary and intrusive, and his conduct in associating with publicans and sinners as inconsistent with any claims to his respectful attentions.

Let us, my friends, avoid a conduct so contradictory and so odious as that of Simon the Pharisee. We profess to receive Jesus Christ. Let us then receive him with the feelings of sincere affection and reverence. Let our hearts be filled with emotions suitable to the language in which we invite him to be our Saviour. And let our deportment correspond in every respect with the declarations of discipleship which we make to him, and the hopes of happiness which we derive from him. Instead of proudly depending upon ourselves as if we had merit sufficient to secure our own salvation, let us put our confidence in his righteousness, and by a humble faith in

that, seek for justification and eternal life. Instead of being ashamed or afraid to avow our belief in his name, let us openly glory in the relation in which we stand to him as his followers, and set the ridicule and persecution of the world at defiance, that we may honour his Gospel and his cross. Instead of questioning his authority to teach and to command us, let us patiently and chearfully listen to those lessons of wisdom which he inculcates in his word, and study in every thing to be "righteous before him, walking in all his commandments, and in all his ordinances, blameless."

We may farther observe, that the Pharisee and his brethren who were with him, were displeased at Christ for declaring to the woman that her sins were forgiven. "They began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?" If they were displeased at Christ for taking it upon him to forgive sins in *any case*, their displeasure was unreasonable, because the power which he had to work miracles

was a sufficient authority for the power which he assumed to forgive sins. To have exercised the latter unwarrantably, while yet he possessed and exercised the former, would have been nothing less than God's contradicting himself in the person of his messenger Jesus Christ. If the Pharisees were displeased at him for proclaiming pardon to such a notorious sinner as this woman seems to have been, still their displeasure was most unreasonable ; for the more sinful she was, the more did she deserve pity, and need forgiveness ; and while Christ pardoned her, he did it in such a way as to give no countenance to guilt—the pardon being immediately and inseparably connected with genuine penitence, and a cordial reception of him as the Saviour.—Still, therefore, let the conduct of the Pharisee be the object of our aversion. Let us be comforted and gladdened to think that Christ is invested with a prerogative so much suited to our necessities as sinners—that he is “ exalted as a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and the forgive-

ness of sins"—and that the vilest of us who repent and believe the Gospel, shall experience his saving mercy. And when we see such of our fellow-creatures as seemed to be given over to a reprobate mind, plucked like brands out of the burning, and shewing by their tears, and their reformation, and their joy, that they have felt the power, and tasted the grace, of Jesus, instead of viewing such an event with envy or with murmurs, and making it the occasion of painful recollections and ungenerous reproaches, let us regard it as a subject of holy admiration, of devout thanksgiving, of heartfelt pleasure, that a trophy so glorious is thus gained to the Saviour's cross—that a human soul has been rescued from the depths of perdition, and redeemed to heaven and to God.

III. Let us now, *thirdly*, consider the treatment which Christ gave both to the Pharisee and the woman.

1. He reproved the Pharisee for his unfounded and illiberal sentiments; and his

reproof was not more just and pointed, than it was mild and delicate. It shewed the Pharisee that he was a prophet, because it was a reply to thoughts which had not been expressed, and could be known only to a person who knew what was in man. It vindicated him for allowing the woman who had been so great a sinner to touch him, and approach his person with more than usual familiarity. And it was introduced in such a way, and delivered in such terms, as to produce a very powerful effect, if the mind of a Pharisee had been susceptible of saving impressions from the rebukes of one at once so faithful and so hated as Christ. “And Jesus, answering, said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor, which had two debtors; the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty; and when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he

to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged." The principle which he thus established by the confession of the Pharisee himself, he now applies to the case before them, so as to demonstrate to the Pharisee that he was wrong, himself being judge. "And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thy house, thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head." She has stood at my feet, and her tears which have flowed plentifully, and her hair which hangs loose and dishevelled, in token of her "godly sorrow" for sin, may be said, without any violent figure, to have done what your want of hospitality had neglected. "Thou gavest me no kiss; but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet." She has kissed my feet as a mark at once of her tender affection and profound humility. "Mine head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed

my feet with ointment." She has not merely anointed my head, but even my feet; and she has done so from a vessel of richly perfumed ointment, which she has purchased and brought for the very purpose. "Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for," or, as it should have been rendered, therefore, "she has loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." Her iniquities, as I knew well, have been numerous and great, but they have been freely pardoned. She feels the change that has been effected in her heart and her condition. She was deeply convinced of her absolute need of it. She is fully aware of its unspeakable value. Her soul is full of gratitude for the blessing. And, as I have been the means of bringing her to repentance, forgiveness, and peace, her gratitude is expressed to me by those tokens which nature dictates, or which the occasion requires. But, Simon, you have shewn me little, or rather no gratitude, because you are completely wrapt up in the notions of

self-sufficiency ; you do not feel your need of repentance and salvation, of course you have not applied for these blessings, or experienced them ; and therefore not being sensible of any obligation, thankfulness finds no place either in your mind or conduct.— Having thus reproved the Pharisee, our Saviour,

2. Gave encouragement to the woman. He had shewn, in what he said to Simon, that she was perfectly justifiable in all that she did—that her behaviour was natural, respectful and affectionate—that she acted a part most honourable to him, and most creditable to herself. But, lest her mind should be depressed by any symptoms of displeasure that the Pharisee might have exhibited, and to put the nature of her spiritual state in the sight of God out of all question—he said unto her, in the hearing of all the company, “ Thy sins are forgiven.” And when they began to find fault with him for assuming such a power, instead of recalling or qualifying what he had already declared, he repeated and con-

firmed it. “Thy faith hath saved thee—go in peace.” Having put thy confidence in me, thy salvation is certain and secure—not to be endangered by the malice of men, nor even by all the powers of darkness. Go, then, and enjoy that tranquillity of soul which the experience of divine forgiveness and favour alone can impart. And “let the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep thy heart and mind through Christ Jesus.”

O how highly favoured—how pre-eminently blessed are those to whom the Saviour addresses such comfortable and encouraging language! How happy beyond expression are those whom he thus acknowledges, pardons, saves, and supports! We, my friends, cannot expect that Christ should now, with an audible voice, declare us to be among the number of the redeemed. But this is not requisite for our consolation and good hope through grace.—There are evidences of divine mercy, on which the seal of unchangeable faithfulness is impressed, and which forbid us either to doubt

or to despond. Let us repent, and we have the word of God for it, that our sins are blotted out. Let us believe, and the same word of truth assures us, that we shall be saved. Let us "love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity," and we have before us a demonstration that our love will be pleasing to him, and that every instance of homage and of obedience which our gratitude has suggested, will meet with a ready acceptance, and a gracious reward. And "living thus by faith in the Son of God," and walking in the ways of his commandments, the period will come when Christ, from his throne of exaltation and judgment, and in the presence of an assembled world, shall pronounce upon us that gladdening sentence which shall waft us to the sinless abodes of glory and of bliss. That this may be the happy state of all of us, may God of his infinite mercy grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord ! Amen.

LECTURE IX.

MATTHEW vii. 1—11.

1. Judge not, that ye be not judged.—2. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.—3. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?—4. Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?—5. Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.—6. Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.—7. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:—8. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.—9. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?—10. Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?—11. If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

IN the passage that we have now read, our Saviour gives three general admonitions. The first respects the judgments which we form and pass upon the conduct of our

brethren. The second intimates the prudence to be exercised in communicating instruction, or administering reproof. And the third refers to the duty of prayer.

I. In the *first* place, he gives an admonition respecting the judgments which we form and pass upon the conduct of our brethren.

“Judge not.” Our Saviour cannot mean by this, to prohibit us *absolutely* from entertaining an unfavourable opinion of our fellow-men, or from pronouncing an unfavourable sentence upon their character. To require us to refrain from such an exercise of our moral powers in all circumstances, would be to require an attainment which the very constitution of our nature—whether fallen or restored—prevents us from making. It would be to impose a restraint upon us, calculated to create and to cherish in our minds an indifference to the grand practical distinctions of right and wrong. And it would be in direct opposition to many precepts in Scripture, which

command us to “mark those who cause divisions and offences”—to “withdraw ourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly”—and to “reprove the unfruitful works of darkness.” Occasions will occur when we may feel ourselves constrained to condemn the sentiments or the actions of those whom we are otherwise disposed to regard with favour and partiality. It may not unfrequently happen that we shall be necessitated to inquire into the demerits of an individual, and to state the conclusions in which our investigations have resulted. We may often meet with cases, in which the spiritual welfare of others may be essentially promoted by a faithful exposition, and a pointed rebuke, of their errors. And it is always useful to ourselves to discriminate accurately between the good and the bad, and not to allow the latter, from a misplaced or excessive lenity, to enjoy that approbation to which the former alone are entitled.

The injunction of our Lord, when he says “Judge not,” is directed against the

indulgence of a censorious disposition. We are not unnecessarily or officiously to pry into the conduct of our neighbours or our acquaintances, for the purpose of discovering their faults. We are not to decide against them without impartial consideration and sufficient evidence. We are not to dive into their secret motives, which we have not the means of ascertaining; nor to exaggerate their delinquency by suspicions which we cannot verify, and allegations which we cannot prove. We are not to blame them with more severity than their guilt deserves; to swell their unintentional mistakes into heinous crimes; to select them with uncalled for and iniquitous partiality from among their fellows as the objects of our reproach; nor to censure them with that harsh and relentless temper which delights more to condemn than to forgive, and tends rather to harden than to reform.

We are to act a part diametrically opposite to this. We are to interfere with the character of a brother, only when our own

personal duty, or his real advantage, or the best interests of society and the church, render it expedient and necessary. And then we are to proceed with all the caution, and delicacy, and forbearance, of which circumstances will admit. We are to judge “righteous judgment;” and to be under the influence of that “charity which covereth a multitude of sins,” which “rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth—thinketh no evil—believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”

This is the practice we are to maintain; and our Saviour enforces it by several considerations.

1. “Judge not, that ye be not judged; for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” Your own interest requires that you avoid all rash, unjust, and uncharitable, judgment. If you do not, you may expect the world to retaliate. Men will treat you as you have been accustomed to treat them.

They will imitate your own example, and conform to your own standard. And, consequently, your whole deportment will be watched and scrutinized with a jealous eye. Not one blemish in it will escape unnoticed. Every thing you do amiss will be instantly marked and rigorously condemned. No excuses will be admitted or sustained. And it will be considered as nothing more than an act of justice to dwell upon your failings and your offences with that stern and unforgiving severity, and to make them bear against your reputation with all that injurious effect, which your own mode of judging in the case of others has provoked at least, if it cannot justify it. Thus you will read your sin in your punishment, even from men, and even in this world.

But that is comparatively nothing. It is “a small matter to be judged of man’s judgment.”—“Verily there is a God that judgeth.” Before his tribunal you must appear at last; by his sentence your everlasting condition will be fixed; and he

has declared in his word, that “ they shall have judgment without mercy, that have shewed no mercy.” The Judge of heaven and of earth indeed will do right. He will be actuated by none of that resentment from which you have suffered here. No part of his procedure will be marked with unrighteousness. But, destitute of that charity and forbearance to the conduct of your fellow creatures which a consciousness of your own frailty might have dictated, which the commandment of your Divine Master prescribed, and which his example recommended, you cannot complain that God should withhold from you, on the day of final retribution, that compassion which you habitually withheld from others. Heaven is the habitation of love. Devoid of charitable affection, you cannot be admitted there. Your temper and your conduct have fitted you for that place alone where malice and hatred hold their residence, and where those who cherish them are punished with everlasting destruction. But, on the other hand, follow the admo-

nitition of your Saviour, and you shall experience both from God and men that benevolent treatment which you yourselves have displayed. Men will regard you, and speak of you, and behave towards you, with that kindness and candour by which your demeanour towards them has been distinguished. And God has declared, that “with the merciful he will shew himself merciful.” He will bless them upon earth, and he will reward them in heaven.

2. The second consideration by which our Saviour enforces his precept, is contained in the third and fourth verses. “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and behold a beam is in thine own eye?”—These words hold out the consideration of inconsistency. Our brother’s eye has but a mote in it; we are quick to discover and to notice that, though it be so inconsiderable as scarcely to be capable of detection.

We have a beam in our own eye, which impairs and endangers our vision ; and yet we pay no attention to that in which we are so immediately and necessarily concerned, while we employ ourselves in narrowly observing a more trifling evil, which has only a remote and secondary claim on our regard.

This, however, is only the figure to illustrate the real case which our Saviour has in view. The real case is this. Our neighbour has some defect in his temper, or some fault in his conduct, which it would have required but a small portion of charity to forgive or to overlook. But instead of endeavouring to banish it from our recollection, or to conceal it from the view of the world, or to extenuate it in the estimation of those who might be tempted to exaggerate it, we instantly and wantonly make ourselves busy with its detection and exposure ; we regard it in the darkest colours in which imagination can paint it ; we talk of it as an unequivocal symptom of the depravity of the individual to whom

it attaches ; and either vent our displeasure against him in the language of strong reprobation, or endeavour to amend him by vehement and harsh reproof. This would be unbecoming and improper, even though we were completely redeemed from the errors into which he has unhappily fallen. But it is to be remembered, that we have the same corrupt passions to struggle with that he has ; that they have often subdued our better principles, as they have subdued his, and led us captive, like him, in the ways of sin ; that our character is marked with iniquities of greater magnitude, and of deeper shade by far, than that which we have pronounced to be so gross and unpardonable in his ; that while in the sight of God we are both unworthy, yet, in comparison, the offence which we have so acutely perceived, and so severely censured in him, is, to the greater offences of which we have been guilty, as a mote is to a beam. And, in all this, what a shameful inconsistency do we exhibit ! What arrogance, and presumption,

and absurdity, does it imply ! And how much and how justly does it expose us to the scorn of the wise and the good ! “Thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art, that judgest, for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself ;—for thou that judgest doest the same things.”

Let us be careful to avoid what is thus so erroneous and unworthy. When that censorious turn of mind, which is so congenial to our fallen nature, is tempting us to judge harshly of the failings of our fellow-men, or our fellow Christians, let us resist the temptation, by recollecting our own weakness and our own guilt. Let the recollection bow us into humility, and rebuke us into forbearance and love. Let us exercise, not any indifference nor any indulgence to the sin, but candour and pity to the sinner. And so long as we are beneath him in the attainments of holiness, and are more deserving of reproof than he, let us abstain from assuming the prerogative of judge, and pronouncing upon his moral conduct or his spiritual state, with that

confidence which would demonstrate us to be alike destitute of all sense of propriety, and all regard to consistent conduct.

3. The third and last consideration which our Saviour urges on this topic, is involved in the fifth verse; "Thou hypocrite! first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."—If we are unrenewed and unreformed ourselves, then our zeal to renew and to reform others, by judging of their conduct and reproving them for their sins, is not sincere. It does not proceed from right views, and is not directed to a proper object. It arises not so much from a hatred of sin, as from a desire to find fault with him who commits it. In short, it is mere hypocrisy, as our Lord distinctly intimates; and therefore, equally criminal in itself, and useless in its consequences. So long as we continue hypocrites, so long as we have nothing more than this false and pretended zeal to impel us, we cannot succeed in accomplishing the great end which our judging others ought

to have in view—their reformation and improvement. If we are still under the dominion of sin,—if the eyes of our mind are still blinded by the god of this world,—if our hearts are still perverted and deceived by unsubdued corruption,—then we are unqualified for such a pure and spiritual task. We are incapable of forming accurate judgments, and will be in danger of misleading those whom we attempt to correct and guide by the discipline of reproof. And not only are we subject to this disqualification; we are also in danger of having all our endeavours resisted by an appeal to our own character. If those out of whose eye we are attempting to pull a mote, behold a “beam in our own eye,”—if they observe us running into greater excess of riot, and committing actions more culpable than those which we are reprehending in them,—they will deny our sincerity; they will “set at nought our counsel and despise our reproof;” and will rather take encouragement from our practice to sin, than comply with our precepts to be holy. “Physician, heal

thyselves," will be their only, their constant, their unanswerable reply.

Wherefore, that we may be able, by the divine blessing, to reform others, let us labour in the first instance, by the divine blessing, to reform ourselves. Let us pray for light to our understandings, and sanctification to our hearts, and holy guidance to our lives. Enlightened with the knowledge of divine truth, and "created again in Christ Jesus unto good works," we shall be able, through grace, to do good to our brethren "who are out of the way." We can then rebuke them with skill; with consistency, and with effect. Having removed "the beam from our own eye," we can "see clearly to take the mote out of theirs." They will be satisfied of our sincerity; they will confide in our fitness; they will trust to our candour and our love; they will submit to our guidance; and, our good example, going along with our charitable judgment and our friendly advice, we shall be made instrumental, under God, in reclaiming them from the error of their ways, and

in restoring them to the paths of life, and truth, and salvation.

II. In the *second* place, our Saviour intimates the prudence to be exercised in communicating instruction, and administering reproof. “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine; lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.”

These animals, as you know, were accounted unclean by the law of Moses; and are here employed to represent men of impious sentiments and profligate habits,—men who hate religion, and are disposed to revile and persecute those by whom it is recommended to their attention. To such persons you must be cautious in addressing the truths and warnings of the Gospel. They are, indeed, objects of more compassion than any other class of men, and stand more in need of spiritual direction; and if a favourable opportunity occur for speaking to them of “the things that belong to their

peace," it should be immediately embraced, and diligently improved. If personal affliction has subdued their pride, and softened their minds,—if some awful Providence has arrested or agitated their slumbering thoughts,—if they have conceived for you any attachment resembling the partiality of friendship,—if, as to the affairs of this world, you have easy access to them, and enjoy their confidence,—if at any time, or from any cause, you are at liberty to unfold to them the views with which you yourselves are impressed,—neglect not to enforce upon them, with wisdom and affection, the importance of preparing for eternity. There shall be "glory to God," and "joy in heaven," if you can bring even one of these sinners to repentance. And if you are real Christians, a sense of duty and feelings of benevolence and love to the Saviour, will constrain you, in such cases, to make the attempt, and to employ all the means which may contribute to render it effectual.

But then you must be careful not to al-

low yourselves to be hurried away by a blind or excessive zeal, which looks only to the object of pursuit, and neither regards the propriety of time and place, nor reflects on the probability of success; and which often does a great deal of mischief,—producing or increasing the very evils which it is anxious to remove. Indifference, indeed, to the religious and moral interests of our fellow men is very prevalent and very sinful; and if we allow them to persevere in the thoughtless infidelity they have embraced, and in the wicked habits they have contracted, when we have it in our power to reclaim them, we become partakers of their guilt, and are in danger of suffering in their ruin. We must not be indifferent in such circumstances;—we must be zealous. But then we must have a “zeal that is according to knowledge.” We must “walk with wisdom towards them that are without.” We must be regulated by the prudence which our Saviour himself has inculcated with so much emphasis; and when such characters as those are, to whom he

figuratively alludes, come within our reach, it will be best, in every point of view, to let them alone. They are, in their general state, incapable of understanding, and unqualified for relishing, any thing that we can say to them on divine subjects ; and, therefore, it is wasting to no purpose our time and our patience, which may otherwise be usefully employed. They may consider our reproofs and our remonstrances in the light of an unjustifiable freedom, or an intentional insult ; and may resent our well-meant endeavours with violence and abuse. Our talking to them on the topic of religion may only afford them a handle, or give them a provocation, to “trample it under foot ;” to “blaspheme the holy name by which we are called,” and to speak wantonly and irreverently of the doctrines and the duties of revelation. And thus we should run the hazard of augmenting and confirming their dislike to that system of faith and duty to which we are anxious to reconcile them, and by a practical adoption of which alone they can be saved.

Let us, therefore, beware of intruding upon such persons our warnings and instructions. Let us mourn on account of their low and lost estate. Let us pray for them, “if God peradventure may grant them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth.” Let us be attentive to warn the young, and the heedless, and the simple, against the contagion of their principles, and their example; but, at the same time, let us “not give that which is holy unto the dogs, nor cast our pearls before swine; lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend us.”

III. *Lastly*, Our Saviour here admonishes us with regard to the duty of prayer.

Though there were no natural obligation to pray—yet there is an obligation of this kind laid upon us by the express authority of God. We are commanded to pray. The commandment is distinct, explicit, and reiterated, and he who does not obey it, rebels against the divine authority,—is destitute of what is essential to all

true religion,—neglects the appointed means of obtaining spiritual good,—and cannot, on any warrantable ground, expect the blessings of salvation. Let none of us be so far wanting to ourselves and to our Maker, as to neglect an exercise thus sanctioned and enjoined by heaven. Let us, “in every thing, by prayer and supplication, make our requests known unto God.”

But we must remember that it is not enough simply to pray. While some “have not, because they ask not,”—there are others who “ask and receive not, because they ask amiss.” A great deal depends upon the spirit and manner in which we offer up our devotions. And, on this point, our Lord gives us direction in the passage before us. “Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you; for every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”

We must “ask”—not in any way—but in a way suitable to the nature and pur-

pose of the exercise in which we engage. We must ask for things that are agreeable to the will of God : we must ask with sincerity of heart ; we must ask with humility and resignation ; we must ask with penitential feelings, “ and holy hands ;” we must ask in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, and intercessor with the Father.

We must not only ask, we must also “ seek :” we must be earnest and diligent in prayer : we must not be contented with coldly or occasionally putting up our requests for what we need : we must not permit ourselves to be languid : we must consider prayer as an essential duty, as a constituent part of the business of our spiritual life, as indispensable for the prosperity, and comfort, and happiness, of our souls ; and therefore we must be instant in it : we must engage in it with that warmth of heart, that care and assiduity, which are naturally dictated by a deep sense of its importance and its necessity.

We must not only ask and seek ; we

must moreover “ knock.” This teaches us that we must not grow weary in performing our devotional duty. We must not rest satisfied with praying for a while, and then allow our piety to stop its effusions : we must rather grow more importunate in our applications; and with a mixture of patience and anxiety, wait for the answer of peace. We “ ought always to pray, and not to faint,” as our Saviour elsewhere enjoins. We are to “ pray without ceasing :” that is—we are to be habitually occupied in prayer, and to continue in it, with increasing ardour and intensity, as long as we remain in this world, and need the supplies of grace, and strength, and consolation, which the Hearer of prayer alone can send.

But while our Saviour thus admonishes us as to the duty of prayer, he holds out the greatest encouragement to the performance of that duty. He assures us, that if we pray as he directs us, our labour will not be fruitless. “ If we ask, we shall receive—if we seek, we shall find—if we knock,

it shall be opened to us." It is thus promised that our believing, earnest, unwearyed applications at a throne of grace, will be accepted and answered; and "he is faithful, who has promised:" his promise will not and cannot fail. And so liberal is this truth, that none who come unto God in prayer, will be cast out. *Every one* that asketh, receiveth. God never said to any of his creatures, seek ye my face in vain. His ear is open to the cry of all his people; and if they apply to him in his appointed way, the meanest and most needy of them shall have all their wants supplied out of his inexhaustible fulness.

This willingness on the part of God to hear and answer our prayers, our Saviour farther illustrates, by an appeal to parental feeling and character. "What man is there of you, whom, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?" What parent among you, if his child asked of him food for his support, would be so stupid as to give him what is useless, or so cruel

as to give him what might be pernicious and fatal? “If ye then being evil—if ye with all your imperfection of understanding and all your corruption of heart—“know how to give good gifts” or suitable provision “to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him?” It is to your heavenly Father that you pray. He knows what is best for your present comfort and your future welfare. He looks on you with an affectionate eye, and is ready to grant to you according to your utmost need. He has the universe at his disposal, and can “make all things work together for your good.” Be encouraged, therefore, to pray to him, by the confident persuasion that you shall not pray to him in vain, that he will “receive you graciously, and love you freely,” that he will “do to you and for you abundantly, above what you can either ask or think.”

LECTURE X.

MATTH, vii. 12—20.

12. *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.*—13. *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:*—14. *Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life; and few there be that find it.*—15. *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves:*—16. *Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?*—17. *Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.*—18. *A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.*—19. *Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*—20. *Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*

THE first verse of the passage that we have just read, has the appearance of being related to what goes before it, as a conclusion or inference that is deduced. “*Therefore, all things,*” &c. And several attempts have been made to evince and establish this connection. But though it is easy, in

almost every case, to discover some remote connection of this kind, we deem it most proper and expedient to avoid any thing like a forced or fanciful interpretation of Scripture language. In the present instance, the alleged connection is certainly neither obvious nor natural. And, accordingly, we would embrace the opinion which considers the word rendered *therefore* as a mere expletive—a character which it often bears, both in sacred and profane writers.

The rule which our Saviour lays down in this verse for directing our social conduct, has been universally approved. It is intrinsically good: it may be comprehended by the lowest capacity; and is easily applied to practice. And were it as faithfully observed as it deserves to be, both on account of its own excellence, and of the divine authority by which it is sanctioned, we should not have occasion to lament so many of those violations of truth, and justice, and humanity, by which the face of society is so much disfigured, and its tranquillity so much disturbed.

It must be remarked, however, that this rule is not to be understood literally and absolutely. If so understood, it would often be found equally absurd and dangerous. For instance, if a man were poor, he might be so extravagant as to wish that his rich neighbour should bestow upon him the half of his wealth ; but surely that implies no obligation on him, should he become rich, to gratify the same extravagant wish that might be entertained by a poor brother. And, again, a corrupt heart, or depraved habits, may induce me to ask a friend to minister to my unlawful pleasures ; but, certainly, that would not render it either dutiful or innocent in me to minister to his.

It is evident from these, and many similar examples which will occur to the mind of every individual, that the precept of Christ is to be taken with limitations : Or, more correctly speaking, that it does not so much furnish us with a standard of social duty, as it teaches us to use with impartiality and effect the standard that is already

given. The standard is already given in the law of God. It is by the divine law that we are instructed in all our obligations. It is there, and there alone, we are to learn how to conduct ourselves with respect to our neighbours and our brethren. We are not to be guided by our own feelings, or our own judgments, independently of revelation; for, had this been practicable or sufficient, revelation would not have been necessary. We are to have our understanding enlightened, and our conscience regulated, on this, as on every other subject, by the word of God. When doubtful as to the manner in which we are to treat another in any particular circumstances, we are not to apply for information, in the first instance, to the dictates of our own erring heart: No; but to the infallible directory which is afforded us in the Sacred Scriptures. And our own heart is a safe guide only in so far as its judgments and its affections are conformable to these.

Our Saviour, therefore, must be considered as supposing that those to whom he

here addresses himself, are previously instructed in the law of God ; that they have furnished their minds with all that it commands them to do ; and that in every part of their life, they regard themselves as subject to its authority. But, then he knew the selfishness which pervades human nature ;—he knew how much our convictions of what is right are apt to be perverted, and how much our endeavours to do what is right are apt to be counteracted, by an exclusive or excessive regard to our own interest ;—he knew how generally we are influenced by indifference to the welfare and happiness of those around us, and how often our malignant passions not only prevent us from doing them good, but stimulate us to do them injury. And it is for the purpose of correcting these evils, that he prescribes the rule which we are considering. It is for the purpose of giving a freer operation to our sense of duty ; of enabling us to practise with more ease, with more fidelity, and with more effect, what we already know to be due from man to

man—from the Christian to his neighbour;—it is for this purpose that he says, “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them.” He turns our very selfishness to his own holy and instructive uses. He takes advantage of the power of sympathy, with which our nature is endowed. He desires us to place ourselves in the precise situation of our neighbour:—not that we may thereby become acquainted with the duties we owe to our neighbour, for of these we are previously informed,—but that the veil of self-partiality may be taken from our eyes; that the candour or the kindness which we indulged in with respect to ourselves, may be transferred to him;—that there may no longer be any coldness, or any dislike, to prevent us from doing him the justice, or shewing him the benevolence to which he is entitled;—that we may do to him what God requires us to do, and what we already know that we ought to do, with that chearfulness, and that zeal, which we should have felt in promoting our own per-

sonal advantage ; or that those impressions of right and wrong, which had been at first but feeble, or had been in a great measure effaced, in consequence of the undue influence of self-love, may be revived and strengthened by being placed in more favourable circumstances, and thus allowed to operate with all that energy and freedom which are necessary to render the character consistent and complete.

An individual, we shall suppose, has been requested to give alms to a poor family. He knows that he is bound to be charitable to those who are in want : and to give a supply adequate to his own ability, and to their need. If he knows any thing of Christianity, he knows all this. But then there is rooted in his mind a regard to his own interest, which prompts him to withhold the bounty which duty requires him to bestow, or which prevents him from giving, with that degree of liberality which the occasion requires, or which induces that easy and dull unconcern about the welfare of others, which no speculative notions of

duty can awaken, and no importunities of want and misery can for a moment overcome. To such a man our Saviour says, *Conceive what you would that others should do to you.* Imagine yourself in the situation of the wretched family to whose petitions you are turning a deaf ear. Suppose that you actually suffered all that poverty, and scorn, and anguish, with which they are afflicted. What would you expect in these circumstances from a neighbour, who was at once an opulent man, and a professing Christian? Make their case your own; and say, would not you look for the assistance that you needed? And, would not you feel your sorrows embittered in a tenfold degree, were that assistance refused? And, does not this easy exercise of sympathy shew you, in the clearest, and in the strongest manner, the part which it is incumbent on you to act in the situation in which you are placed? Do to that poor family which needs and solicits your charity “as you would that others should do

to you," were you subjected to the same indigence and helplessness.

There is here an appeal to an original principle—to the most powerful affection of our nature : To that principle—to that affection, which directs us to consult our own indulgence, and to pursue our own interest, as objects of primary importance. Our Saviour lays hold of this, and employs it to quicken our perceptions, and encourage our fulfilment of relative obligation. And it must be acknowledged that if any thing can answer the purpose which he has in view, this promises to be most successful; and is at once a most beneficial rule for us to observe, and a proof of the consummate skill which he possessed as a teacher of morality.

The idea we have been endeavouring to illustrate as that which our Saviour here inculcates, is evinced by what he annexes to the precept; "for this," says he, "is the law and the prophets." It must not, it cannot be supposed, that our Saviour makes the whole range of Christian duty

to be comprehended under this one precept, or that he is holding out submission to the second table of the law, as cancelling in any sense, or in any measure, the obligations of the first. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Now, when our Saviour says in the passage before us, "this is the law and the prophets"—he is referring to the second of these commandments. The precept he enjoins, is the sum and substance of what the law and the prophets have taught respecting our social duties. It is following up, confirming, and applying, what is comprehended in these words, "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." It goes on the assumption, that we are powerfully and instinctively actuated by self love. It requires us to make this, in some sense, the

measure and standard of our love to others. And prescribes, for that purpose, the habitual practice of putting ourselves, by sympathy, in the situation of others, that we may not only learn more correctly, but feel more strongly, the conduct which we are bound to observe towards them in any given circumstances.

You see, then, my friends, the meaning of our Saviour's rule. It is neither intended by him, nor fitted in its own nature, to supersede the necessity of a previous and minute acquaintance with the duties which you owe to one another. It presupposes an accurate knowledge of these; and without an accurate knowledge of them, indeed, it will in many cases lead you astray. But having a well-informed conscience as to all that is required of you in your relative deportment, let our Saviour's precept be constantly referred to, and faithfully observed, to render your information as useful and effectual as it ought to be. Put yourselves in the place and circumstances of those with whom you have to do. Enquire at your own minds how you would

wish them to speak or to act with respect to *you*. And let the answer to that inquiry guide and govern you in your behaviour towards *them*. This will be a happy means, under the divine blessing, of preventing you from committing any injustice or any cruelty against your neighbours, and of enabling you to cultivate, with becoming ardour and assiduity, that love which is “the bond of perfectness, and the fulfilling of the law.”

“Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction; and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life; and few there be that find it.”

Our existence upon earth must terminate in one or other of two states—either in a state of happiness, or in a state of misery; either in eternal life, or in eternal destruction. This is the doctrine of our Saviour in the passage before us. It is a doctrine which he frequently and pathetically inculcates. It is a doctrine on

which his apostles dwell with great emphasis. It is the doctrine which gives to revelation almost all its interest and importance. And it is a doctrine with which our minds cannot be too deeply impressed, or too seriously affected. It is a solemn thing to die, even when that event is merely viewed as a departure from this world; but it becomes infinitely more solemn when viewed as our introduction into a world that shall have no end, and where we shall either be exalted to the joy that is “unutterable and full of glory,” or doomed to that place of punishment in which “the worm dieth not, and the fire is never quenched.”

But it is also the doctrine of Christ, that the nature of our condition in the next world will depend upon our character in this. What we are here, will determine what we are to be hereafter. There is a way that leads—there is a gate that opens, into life. There is a way that leads—there is a gate that opens, into destruction. There is a conduct which prepares

us for the one, and there is a conduct which prepares us for the other. The conduct which prepares us for "life," is the conduct which is recommended and enjoined in the Gospel. The conduct which prepares us for "destruction," is the conduct against which the Gospel warns and guards us. And the connection between these two modes of conduct and these two states of being, is fixed and unalterable. It arises from the essential nature of the case itself; and it is appointed of God, the perfection of whose character, and the honour of whose government, require him to give it permanent and unchangeable effect.

"Strait is the gate," says Christ, "and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life." This figurative language intimates not only that there is but one line of conduct by pursuing which we can hope to reach the happiness of heaven, but also that our pursuit of that implies what is difficult and distressing to human nature. It implies, that we mortify that pride which would

prevent us from being indebted for salvation to the sovereign grace of God, and the imputed righteousness of Christ; that we subdue those passions and appetites which would lead us into irregular indulgence; that we deny ourselves to every pleasure which is inconsistent with evangelical purity; that we perform every duty, however painful and difficult, which the law of God prescribes; that we keep our hearts, as well as our outward deportment, free from the pollutions of sin; that we watch against all the temptations, and struggle against all the spiritual enemies we are exposed to in this evil world; and that we be prepared to suffer persecution, and even death itself, if it shall be necessary, for preserving our faith, and maintaining a good conscience.

But, on the other hand, "wide is the gate, and broad is the way, which leadeth to destruction." You have only to leave the "narrow way that leadeth unto life," to turn to the one side or to the other, and you are immediately on the "broad way,"

that leads to destruction. Nothing more is necessary than that you shall adopt the resolution of living as you please; and whether you depart much or little from the path of Christian duty; whether you habitually indulge in one sin or in many; whether you are almost a Christian, or in any one of the innumerable varieties of character which are not governed by the great principles of love to God and faith in Christ;—in all these cases you are advancing to perdition; and just as decidedly in the state which our Saviour here describes, as if you had gone so far as to “glory in your shame.” There are, indeed, different degrees of guilt in those to whom he alludes, to which different degrees of punishment will be awarded. But, being all the workers of iniquity, they shall all receive the sentence of condemnation. We would do well, my friends, to attend to this alarming consideration. We are apt to forget and disregard it. We are apt to conclude that our character is good, and our condition safe, because we are not so degenerate and wicked.

as many others around us. The duties which we omit are not so important as those which they neglect. The vices in which we indulge are not so heinous as those to which they are addicted. We are less indecent, and less worldly, and less hardened, than they. And we have even many symptoms and appearances of being travellers to Zion, of which they are entirely destitute. But what of all this, when we recollect how "broad is the way," and how "wide is the gate, which leadeth to destruction?" They may be farther advanced, they may be moving with greater speed, they may be more heedless of their steps, and have a pleasure in going into bye ways, and crooked paths of sin, from which we start back with horror; but what of that, when we are taking the very same direction, when we are stimulated by the same principles and feelings, when we are equally without the fear of God, which secures universal obedience, and without the faith of Christ which overcomes the world, and when all the seeming worth on which

we plume ourselves, may be traced to the mere absence of outward temptation, or to a mere hypocritical assumption of virtues, to which there is no counterpart in our heart?

Let us think seriously of this, my friends; and let us think more seriously of it still, when we hear our Saviour saying—not only “wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction,”—but also “*many* there be which go in thereat:”—not only “strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life”—but also “*few* there be that find it.” There are few real Christians—few who will enter into life. There are many who are not real Christians—many who shall suffer destruction.

Let none attempt to *deny* the assertion. It is the assertion of Him who knew all things from the beginning to the end; and it is abundantly confirmed, if confirmation were necessary, by the fact which presents itself to our view whenever we look upon the world, and judge even with the warmest charity, according to the prin-

ciples of the Gospel. Let none *murmur* at the fact—melancholy and distressing as it is. It is only a fact which *actually* exists—and not a fact which must *necessarily* exist; and Christ adduces it not to wound our benevolent feelings, or to sink us into dejection and despair, but to awaken us from our dangerous security, and to alarm, if he cannot allure us into the way of salvation. If, my friends, you add to the “many” who are in the “broad way which leadeth to destruction,” the fault is your own. God “has no pleasure in the death of the wicked;” he has told you so; and he calls upon you to repent;—but you will not obey his call. Jesus Christ is willing to save you; he invites you to accept of his redemption;—but “ye will not come unto him that ye may have life.” The Holy Spirit strives with you;—but you resist his influences, and “do despite unto the Spirit of grace.” You are determined to follow your own counsel, and to pursue your own course. Do so—but murmur not at the fact which you yourselves are thus in-

strumental in establishing and augmenting. Remember that all the guilt is your own, as all the condemnation will be your own.

Yet we would neither have you to be guilty nor condemned. Listen to the voice of your compassionate and almighty Redeemer. He speaks to you in the voice of warning and alarm—but it is, that you may be saved. He exhorts you to enter in at the strait gate. And, unworthy as you are; long as you have refused his invitation; ungratefully as you have requited his mercy; obstinately as you have disobeyed his commands;—he has not yet shut the gate of heaven and of life against you. He “waits to be gracious” to you, though you be the chief of sinners. “Deny yourselves, then—take up your cross and follow him.” His blood will cleanse you from all your guilt. His Spirit will sanctify, and guide, and support you, in your earthly pilgrimage. His Father will receive you into that “city, whose maker and builder is God.” And there you shall dwell for ever in those mansions of blissful rest.

which the Saviour has prepared for such as have walked in the narrow way, and passed through the strait gate.

In the 15th, and the five following verses, our Saviour warns his hearers against false prophets or false teachers. The teachers to whom he more particularly refers, are those who are influenced by secular and unworthy views. They “come in sheep’s clothing”—with all the appearance of humility, innocence, and meekness. But this is mere hypocrisy; for “within”—in reality—“they are ravening wolves.” They have no kind, no conscientious regard for the flock whose interests they pretend to seek. Their only object is to aggrandize themselves, to feed their avarice, their vanity, or their ambition. And, for this purpose, they scruple not to neglect, to mislead, and even to ruin, those who have been committed to their pastoral care. Against all such teachers we are to be on our guard. It is not requisite that we reject every thing that they inculcate. For, of course, they will find it expedient to

declare a considerable proportion of the truth; and in some cases they may not perhaps be far from declaring the whole of it. But then whatever they teach must be received with caution. They are so deeply corrupted, that they can have no cordial regard for sound doctrine, and they will not hesitate to misrepresent and pervert it, whenever it answers the sinister ends at which they are perpetually aiming. So that unless we beware of them, we shall be in danger of being drawn away "from the simplicity that is in Christ."

We may "know them by their fruits." We "do not gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles." We cannot reasonably expect to see those who are unrighteous themselves abounding in the works of righteousness. "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit." A good man will shew his excellence in the goodness of his conduct. A bad man will exhibit his worthlessness in deeds of iniquity. "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither

can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." He who has the real principles of the gospel abiding in his heart, cannot be habitually wicked in his life. And no more can he whose mind is at enmity with God, be distinguished by a habitual obedience to the divine commandments. The false teacher may impose upon us for a while—he may send forth the vigorous branches of learning and talent—he may display the verdant foliage and beautiful blossom of a fair profession—but it is impossible that year after year he should have his "fruit unto holiness." There will sooner or later be exhibited a marked inconsistency between his office and his character. He will be careless and unfaithful with respect to his people; he will be worldly and vicious with respect to himself; and every thing he does will be influenced, more or less, by the unsanctified views with which he has become a teacher of the religion of Christ, and taken upon him the care of souls whom he does not love.

And while we are directed to apply this

test in order to discover who are the false teachers of whom we are to beware, it is also mentioned that such teachers have an awful responsibility resting upon them, and shall suffer a signal punishment. "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the fire." False teachers have much to answer for. They are hypocrites of the worst kind. They profane the most sacred ordinance that Christ has instituted in his church. They trifle with obligations of unspeakable importance and solemnity. They are instrumental in destroying the immortal souls of those who follow them. And thus, far more than other sinners, they "treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgments of God." This is said of them by our Saviour, to induce us to give the more earnest heed that we be not seduced by their delusions, and to alarm them, if possible, into a serious consideration of their danger, and an immediate repentance of their sins. From all such teachers may God

deliver and protect his church ; and where any of them have been suffered to intrude, may the people be preserved in soundness of faith, and in purity of practice !

But while there are teachers who are in this manner knowingly and intentionally false, you should never forget that we are all liable to be false teachers in a less exceptionable sense. We are men of fallible judgments, and “ of like passions with yourselves.” And however upright in our intentions, and however diligent in our researches, and however desirous to promote your best interests, we may fall into error, and give you instructions different from what you ought to receive. Far from wishing to conceal this, we would request your particular attention to it, and entreat you never to lose sight of it ;—not, however, for the purpose of making you suspicious or distrustful of our ministrations, but for the purpose of leading you to adopt those measures of precaution which may prevent you, as much as possible, from imbibing

our prejudices and mistakes. We ask you to pray for us often and fervently, that we may be enabled, by divine grace, "rightly to divide the word of truth." We ask you, in every case, to act upon the enlightened principle of Protestantism, and to exercise, with regard to all you may hear from us, your own independent judgment. And we ask you to compare what we say with the declarations of the Bible, to decide upon our doctrine by the doctrine which you find in its hallowed pages, to take it as the great and only rule of all that you are to believe, and of all that you are to practise. Let us all learn to make our appeal to the Scriptures, under deeper impressions of their importance and authority, than any we have yet experienced. Let us all seek to be taught of God; and while we make a proper use of every instrument he employs for enlightening our minds and purifying our hearts, let us continually look up to Him, to his word, and to his Spirit, for instruction in every truth, and

direction in every duty. Then shall we avoid the evil of being misled by human authority, and become, indeed, "wise unto salvation."

LECTURE XI.

ACTS iii. 12—16.

12. *And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?—*
13. *The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.—*
14. *But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;—*
15. *And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.—*
16. *And his name, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know; yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.*

IN the preceding part of the chapter, we have an account of a miraculous cure that was performed by Peter and John. The person on whom the miracle is said to have been performed, was a proper subject for such a work. His disease was incurable by human skill; and its existence and ex-

tent were perfectly known to thousands. It was removed by a mere authoritative mandate from the Apostles—without the intervention of any ordinary means. The cure was instantaneous, like the effect of a divine energy—not gradual, like the result of human sagacity. And it was perfect, shewing adequacy in the power that wrought it—not partial, which would have indicated imperfection in the cause. The transaction had all possible publicity, having taken place in circumstances which afforded every chance of detection, had it been false, and which, therefore, could not possibly have been chosen by men who intended to deceive. And, finally, the miracle was impressed with that moral character which we should have expected to distinguish it, as proceeding from the compassionate and gracious Parent of mankind—it was “full of mercy.” In other words, this work has all those qualities and features which go to constitute a true miracle; and, consequently, may be referred to as a proof of that religion in whose record it is

engrossed, and for whose support it was performed.

In the passage that we have read as the subject of our present meditations, there are three leading points which we are naturally led to consider. There is, *first*, The humility of the Apostles in disclaiming the honour of this miracle, and ascribing it to God. There is, *secondly*, The aggravated guilt of the Jews in the treatment which they gave to Jesus Christ. And there is, *thirdly*, God's testimony to Jesus in raising him from the dead, of which fact the Apostles were witnesses, and in permitting or appointing miracles to be wrought in his name, which they asserted to have happened in the case of this poor man.

I. There is, *first*, The humility of the Apostles in disclaiming the honour of this miracle, and ascribing it to God. "And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? Or why look ye so earnestly on

us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus."

Had the Apostles been wilful deceivers, it would have been their constant endeavour to excite the admiration of the multitude, and to secure to themselves the admiration which they had excited. Whether they aimed at reputation, or influence, or pecuniary advantage, or any other sinister object, popular applause would have been equally gratifying to their feelings, and useful to their cause. And the higher the ideas were that men entertained of them, so much the better was it for promoting their views. So that, in this case, we should have seen them perpetually anxious, not only to stand well with the people, but to obtain from them as much respect and veneration as possible:—we should have seen them rejoicing with a selfish satisfaction when their attempts to acquire honour had been attended with any portion of suc-

cess :—nay, if we may judge from what is usually, or rather uniformly, exhibited in the case of imposture, we should have seen them so elated by that success, as to grasp with eagerness at any idolatry that was offered to them,—becoming proud, arrogant and ostentatious of their supposed endowments,—and ready at once to receive as their right the homage that was rendered, and even to demand more than there was any disposition to give.

This is what, in all probability, we should have seen, had the Apostles been guilty of supporting a “cunningly devised fable.” And yet they acted in a manner the very reverse of this. They shewed no desire to have the public regards fixed and centered on their own personal gifts. When a favourable opportunity occurred of exalting—they abased themselves. They refused to be considered in any degree as the cause of that of which they were only the instruments. Nothing was easier than to arrest the admiration and respect of the multitude, and to employ it in feeding their own

vanity, and advancing their own schemes ; yet, with the utmost honesty, and without any hesitation, they renounced every pretension to merit, expostulated with those who seemed desirous to ascribe to them the honour of the miracle, and referred them to that great invisible Being, by whose energy alone it had been performed. “ Ye men of Israel,” why do you wonder at this, as if no such thing had ever happened before, and do not rather consider it as another link in that chain of evidence by which God has been manifesting to you the truth of the Gospel? It is perfectly analogous to those works which Jesus wrought while he dwelt among you, that you might perceive and acknowledge the divinity of his mission. He, indeed, was greater than we. He was the distinguished prophet who should redeem Israel:—we are only his servants. But our object is the same. We are prosecuting that scheme which he began : and the power by which we have cured this poor man is the very same with that by which he accomplished

all those extraordinary cures that rendered his life so illustrious for greatness and mercy. Why, then, should you look on us with such earnest attention, and seem to trace to any attribute or excellence of ours the transaction that you have now been contemplating? We deserve no praise on account of it. It has not been done by any independent authority that we possess over the operations of nature;—we are weak, and can do nothing. It has not been effected in consequence of any claim that our moral conduct has given us on the divine interposition:—we are corrupted, and have no merit to plead. You must therefore look beyond us; and must devoutly, as you will justly, fix your regard on the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, who has determined for himself the laws by which he governs the world, and who alone can suspend any of them, to suit the purposes of his administration.” Such is the import of the Apostle’s language in the 12th and 13th verses.

Now, my friends, while we recognise in

this disinterested and pious conduct of the Apostles, a strong presumption of their integrity, and have reason to conclude from it, that they were bearing true witness to the religion of Christ, let us profit by the moral lesson which it is fitted to convey. Let it teach us, in the midst of all our spiritual attainments, and of all our success in the cause of Christianity, to be lowly in the estimate which we form of ourselves. Let us never forget the infirmity and the demerit which attach to us even in our best estate. Let us never forget how incompetent we are to any achievement which should entitle us to stand high in our own conceptions. Let us never forget how entirely we depend on the influences of the divine Spirit, for every thing that is good in us, for every virtue that may adorn our character, for every beneficent deed that we may have done to our fellow creatures. Our faith may be spoken of through the whole world ; in works of charity we may excel all our brethren ; the example which we exhibit may be, in all its fea-

tures, fair, and honourable, and good ; we may have been the means of blessing thousands with the knowledge of salvation ; and it may be in the anticipation of those who have beheld the extent and the fruits of our benevolence, that generations yet unborn shall arise to call us blessed ;—but let us remember, that it is “ by the grace of God that we are what we are ;” let our language always be, “ Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be all the praise :” And, when the applause of the world is bestowed on us, “ as if by our own power or holiness” we had done these things, let us not only repress those feelings of self-complacency, which it is so apt to create, but let us endeavour to correct the mistaken notions of our admirers, by directing their views to him, by whom we have been both disposed and enabled to abound in godliness and good works.

Such humility corresponds with the truth of the case, as our own hearts may testify, and with the nature and tendency of the Gospel, one object of which is to bear

down the lofty imaginations and vain glory of man, and to magnify the grace, and power, and sovereignty of God. It is calculated to promote our own improvement, not merely because it prevents us from ever thinking “that we have already attained, or that we are already perfect,” but because the exercise of it is connected with the divine promise, that while “God resisteth the proud, he giveth grace to the humble.” And it will go far to promote, what we should all have constantly at heart, the interests of true religion among men; for nothing tends more to recommend religion, than the modest, unassuming temper of those who profess it, and that habitual consciousness of imperfection and unworthiness, which, avoiding all ostentation so indicative of spiritual pride, refers the endowments of the mind and the graces of the character, equally to “the Father of Lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift.”

II. Let us now consider the aggravated

guilt of the Jews in the treatment which they gave to Jesus Christ as it is here represented by the Apostles.

Although Peter arrogated to himself and John no merit and no praise, on account of the miracle, yet he took occasion, boldly and explicitly, to remind the Jews of their criminal rejection of the Messiah. He introduces his rebuke with much prudence and address. When he ascribes the miracle to God, he speaks of him as the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of their fathers—intimating by this, that the religion of Christ was not inconsistent with that of Moses;—that it was not at all intended to destroy or diminish their regard for the God of Israel;—that the God of Israel was the God who had glorified Jesus, by empowering them to work a miracle in his name. He also seized the favourable moment when their minds were in some measure struck with astonishment, and subdued into reverence, by what they had just witnessed, and consequently were better prepared to receive the

reproof and admonition that he was about to administer.

But though he introduces his charge against them in a most cautious and skilful manner, so as to offend their prejudices as little, and to make his discourse as effectual as possible, he did not in the remotest degree compromise his fidelity, or endeavour to win them by concealing the truth. Indeed, while he prepared them for the accusation he was about to adduce, that preparation was such as to render them less irritable under it, and at the same time to impart to it additional severity and force. The charge which he brings against them is broad and serious, and the language in which it is conveyed is plain and unequivocal. They delivered up Jesus to the Roman governor as a criminal, though they knew of no crime that they could substantiate against him, and were obliged to have recourse to false witnesses in order to gain their end. They denied and abjured him in the presence of Pilate, though he, certainly not one of the most equitable or

humane judges, was so satisfied of his innocence as to be determined on his acquittal. They renounced him as one pretending to have any claims on their esteem or respect, notwithstanding the perfect inoffensiveness and holiness of his character, known to themselves, proclaimed by his judge, and notorious to the whole world. They preferred to him one who had been guilty of the very offence of which they had most iniquitously accused him, and who had added murder to sedition. And, not contented with disclaiming all allegiance to Jesus, they put him to a cruel and ignominious death;—thus “killing the Prince of Life,”—one who had come among them, and who had laboured among them, “not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them;” and who not only attended most compassionately to the comfort of their temporal existence, but also imparted to them the blessings of spiritual, and secured for them a title to everlasting life.

Such was the conduct of which the Jews had been guilty towards Jesus. And the

Apostle presses it upon them with the greater earnestness, because he is going to exhort them to the work of repentance. This was a doctrine peculiarly applicable to them, in reference to the subject on which he had been addressing them. It applies to all men, for all have sinned—but it was necessary, above ordinary measure, for those who had actually crucified the Son of God. And as the reality and extent of its exercise must depend on the sense of guilt which is entertained, the Apostle sets before them their deep and aggravated demerit in the most pointed terms: in order that, by having the turpitude of their conduct strongly impressed upon their minds, their penitence might be sincere and cordial, and, by the divine blessing, issue in complete conversion unto God, through that very Saviour whom, “with wicked hands, they had crucified and slain.”

This is precisely the method which the ministers of the Gospel are bound to adopt, when inculcating repentance and conversion on their people. And, instead of being

offended when we endeavour to convince you of your sinfulness, that we may thus prevail upon you to “flee from the wrath to come,” you should rather be satisfied that we are faithful in this respect to your souls, for whose salvation we are appointed to minister, and faithful to him whose servants we are, and who “came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” It is necessary that you shall repent—for “except ye repent, ye shall perish.” That this change may take place in your affections and your conduct, it is essential that you have lively impressions of your unworthiness, that your transgressions be placed distinctly before the eye of your mind, that you think seriously of their number and their aggravations, and that you feel all the regret and sorrow which their pressure upon your conscience is calculated to create. And whether we shall do our duty in urging these things on your attention or not, it is evidently for your advantage that they be set before you in every light which can interest and arouse you—

clothed in all the terrors of the law, and connected with all the mercy of the Gospel. Let me therefore intreat you, my friends, to reflect on the corruption of your hearts, and on the iniquity of your ways. Call to remembrance, how often and how much you have displeased a holy God. Consider with what obstinacy you have despised his threatenings and refused his invitations. Think how reluctantly you have obeyed *him*, and how willingly you have followed the dictates of your own sinful passions. Observe what you are, compared with what you ought to have been. Do all this, and you will perceive what reason you have to confess that you are unworthy before God, to mourn with heartfelt sorrow for your sins, and to exercise all the dispositions and feelings of genuine penitence.

It may seem impossible that you can be as guilty as the Jews, whom the Apostle here addresses with such severity of remonstrance. And yet if you examine yourselves with that strictness and impartiality which such an exercise requires, you

may find that your guilt is not so dissimilar to theirs, as to render the language of Peter altogether inapplicable. Have you, after professing to be the disciples of Jesus, indulged yourselves in open violations of his law? Then have you betrayed him into the hands of his enemies, “delivered him up” to those who will judge of him by the conduct of his friends and servants, and compelled them as it were to condemn or to ridicule his pretensions to be the Saviour of sinners. Have you withheld or renounced your attachment to him, notwithstanding all the evidence afforded you of his divine mission, and notwithstanding the acknowledgments that have been made by his bitterest foes, of the innocence and virtue of his character? Then have you identified yourselves with the Jews; you have approved of the treatment which they gave to Christ; you have “filled up the measure of that iniquity” which they committed, when they “denied the Holy One and the Just, in the presence of Pilate, who was determined to let him go.” Have you

refused submission to his authority, and preferred the gratification of your own sordid, or impure, or malevolent desires? Then have you virtually united with the Jews in their mad and wicked cry, "Release unto us Barabbas; but as for this man, away with *him*, crucify him, crucify him!" Have you remained dead in trespasses and sins, and perversely resisted his offers to redeem you from that state, and to give you a new spiritual existence? Then, so far as his character as Saviour can be affected by your conduct, you have walked in the footsteps of the Jews, and joined with them in "killing the Prince of life." In these, and many other respects, you may easily trace such features of resemblance as should make you read the address of Peter with more interest than you have hitherto been accustomed to feel. May the Divine Spirit send it home to your conscience with a powerful effect, and render it instrumental in "bringing you from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto the living God!"

III. It now remains that we say a few words of God's testimony to Jesus, in raising him from the dead, of which fact the Apostles were witnesses, and in permitting or appointing miracles to be wrought in his name, which they asserted to have happened in the case of this lame man. "Whom God hath raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses: And his name, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know; yea the faith which is by him, hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all."

1. In the *first* place, God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus, indeed, was so far overcome by his enemies, as to be put to death by them. This victory, however, was only apparent—not real. Jesus died, "according to the Scriptures," in order to fulfil the great purposes of his incarnation. At the very moment that he expired on the cross, the Father gave witness to his power and his divinity. And, after three days, he removed the fears of his friends, and

cut asunder the hopes of his enemies, by bringing him triumphantly from the grave. This demonstrated, in the clearest manner, that Christ was a divine messenger; and not only proved the truth of his mission, but evinced that God was completely satisfied with all that he had done and suffered in behalf of sinners.

Of Christ's resurrection the Apostles were witnesses. The fact was not merely alleged. It was not a bare probability. It was not the doubtful conclusion of a train of reasoning. It was not a report originating in an unknown or unauthentic source. It was a fact of which they were eye witnesses, and of whose reality their knowledge was certain. Whether we consider their local circumstances, their moral character, their number or their consistency, it is evident that they were fully qualified to be witnesses, and that their testimony is conclusive. And all along they were ready to complete it, by sealing it with their blood, whenever such a sacrifice to the truth was deemed expedient or necessary.

2. In the *second* place, they wrought miracles in support of the cause which they had undertaken. This of itself should have commanded from the Jews a ready assent to all their declarations respecting Christ; but it became irresistible when, as in the case before us, the Apostles wrought their miracles in his name. They made use of the name of Christ; they disclaimed all independent power, and expressed their entire reliance on the energy derived from him. “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” In this manner a connection was established and made obvious between Jesus and the miracle which they performed. Whatever credit was attached to the miracle, was immediately and necessarily transferred to Jesus. So that while it was true that the miracle signified the interposition of God, yet as God permitted it to follow the invocation of Christ’s name, he thereby “glorified” Christ, and exhibited him to the Jews as one who, though he had been “dead, was now alive,” and invested with “all power in heaven

and on earth." If, then, the conduct of the Jews was inexcusable in rejecting Christ, and putting him to death as an impostor, notwithstanding all the proofs which were then before them of his Messiahship,—how great would be their guilt, and how dreadful their punishment, if they did not repent of the treatment they had given him, and embrace him as their Saviour and their Lord, now that the very person whom they had despised, and persecuted, and slain, was proved, beyond all controversy, to be "the Son of God with power!"

This is the practical conclusion to which the statement of the Apostles inevitably leads. Let us take it home to ourselves. Let us recollect that all that accumulation of evidence for the truth of Christ's mission, with which Providence has furnished us, will aggravate our guilt and our punishment, if we remain impenitent and unbelieving under its influence. Let it rather have the effect of establishing, and strengthening, and enlivening that faith in the Redeemer, by which we shall be justified and

saved. Christ is, at this moment, "exalted as a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and the forgiveness of sins." With an arm that is powerful to destroy, but equally powerful to save, he is calling upon us to repent and believe, and obey his Gospel. Let us be constrained by his grace and authority to comply with the call, to forsake the iniquity of our ways, to turn unto the Lord with our whole heart, and to be conformed to the death and resurrection of Jesus, so that, dying unto sin, and living unto righteousness, we may at last be admitted to the joys of heaven.

LECTURE XII.

ACTS iii. 17—21.

17. *And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.—18. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath fulfilled.—19. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord ; —20. And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you :—21. Whom heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.*

IN the immediately preceding verses, we find the Apostle charging home upon the consciences of the Jews, the guilt which they had contracted in crucifying Jesus. He not only sets their crime before them in the clearest light, but mentions various circumstances by which it was aggravated; and endeavours to quicken their recollection and deepen their remorse, by representing Christ as having received from God

a glorious testimony to his character and his mission, after they had killed him. We can conceive nothing more directly, or more powerfully calculated to fill the mind with terror, than those convictions which the address of Peter could not fail to produce in many individuals. Great was their sin in having shed innocent blood; but the enormity of that sin became incalculable when they found that it was "the Holy One and the Just"—the Prince of Life—he whom God had appointed to redeem the world, and who, to the highest personal dignity, added the most endearing condescension and the richest mercy—that it was such a person whom they had unjustly, ungratefully, and impiously suspended on a cross. And the apprehensions of divine displeasure and merited destruction, which the consciousness of such aggravated guilt was fitted to awaken, were naturally embittered by the consideration that the Almighty, as if to demonstrate at once the heinousness of their offence, and the power which would be employed to punish it, had

raised the crucified Jesus from the dead, and authorised the Apostles to work miracles in his name.

That numbers of the Apostle's hearers remained unaffected by all this, is a melancholy fact : but we observe from the sequel, also, that not a few felt the salutary impression which he meant to convey. And lest these should be overwhelmed with a sense of their criminality, and perhaps be driven to despair, he is careful not to push his remonstrances and his accusations too far, but rather contrives to relieve the picture which he had drawn, by introducing such an extenuation as the truth and history of the case suggested.

I. The extenuation which he specifies consists in their *ignorance*. "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." I am aware that neither you nor your rulers would have ventured to commit such a crime, had you been sufficiently acquainted with the nature and the character, the mis-

sion and authority of Jesus. And as this circumstance renders the action less immoral, considered in itself, and affords a presumption that the heart is not quite so depraved as an unqualified and insulated view of your conduct would lead us to suspect, I would hold out to you greater encouragement to hope in the divine mercy, for that forgiveness of which nevertheless you stand so much in need.

It is evident, not only from this, but from various other passages of Scripture, that *ignorance* is sustained in some measure, and in certain situations, as a palliation of guilt. The Apostle Paul, in reference to this very subject, says, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, that “had the princes of this world known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.” “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord,” says the same Apostle, “who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy; because I did it *ignorantly* in un-

belief." Our Saviour himself explicitly sanctions this principle in judging of the demerit of sinners. "The servant," says he, "that knew not his master's will, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with *few* stripes." And we must all recollect the prayer which, from the cross, he put up for his murderers, and the argument with which he enforced it; "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

All this goes to prove that union of righteousness and clemency which characterises the administration of God. He is not a "hard master, reaping where he has not sown, and gathering where he has not strawed." In his government there is none of that rigour which exacts a measure of improvement and of virtue beyond the advantages that we are permitted to enjoy. To whom much is given—of them he asks much; but to whom little is given, of them the less is required. Let none, therefore, when convinced of sin, aggravate its sinfulness, and plunge themselves deeper into

distress, by conceiving harsh notions of that Being whom they have offended, and to whom they are accountable. But while they stand in awe of the holiness and justice which he maintains, let them also think of the condescension and forbearance which he exercises towards his rebellious creatures, and repose confidence in this—that he is “not willing that they should perish,” but is rather anxious, like an affectionate and indulgent parent, to excuse ~~their~~ disobedience, and, as it were, to find out reasons for forgiving them.

Let us, however, beware of any approach to presumption; and especially let us beware of presuming that the mere circumstance of ignorance will secure our pardon. We may be very ignorant, and yet very guilty. This was in some respect the case with the Jews. A considerable portion of their ignorance arose from inattention to the means of instruction with which they were provided, and to that moral perversity which prevented them from understanding aright the doctrines that were preach-

ed to them. In this way, their ignorance was not altogether unavoidable, and consequently they were not held to be wholly innocent. Now, in like manner, though we sin in many instances from ignorance, yet if this ignorance proceed from our own wilful and habitual negligence, we are answerable for it in all its extent, and as to all its effects; for nothing is more certain than that we are responsible for all the known consequences of our voluntary actions. Let us, then, be cautious in seeking for an apology or an extenuation of our misconduct, in our ignorance of the duties or the doctrines of religion. In our case, certainly—who are so highly favoured with the sources and the instruments of knowledge,—ignorance can never be pleaded as an excuse, or as a justification of error and of crime. In our case, ignorance is itself a moral delinquency; and as it is the certain cause of so much vice and wickedness, it is a moral delinquency of no ordinary magnitude. Let us therefore be ashamed of it; let us avoid it; let us labour to have

“ the word of Christ dwelling in us richly in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;” and let us act in a manner suitable to our privileges and our attainments—remembering the words of Jesus—“ if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”

II. To encourage the Jews to repent, Peter still farther directs their attention to the mercy of God, as exercised in overruling the very sin which they had committed, for accomplishing that scheme in virtue of which their sins were to be pardoned. “ But those things which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.” You have crucified Christ. In this you have acted with equal injustice and inhumanity. But his sufferings and death, though in one sense originating in your guilty passions, were the subjects not only of divine prescience, but of divine appointment. And when they happened, there was fulfilled that grand and important event which God had predetermined, in his own

unsearchable counsels, which he foretold by the mouth of his prophets, and which was necessary in order to “take away the sins of the world.” So that at the very moment that you were gratifying your malice and resentment in the crucifixion of Jesus, at that very moment God, who is rich both in wisdom and in mercy, was providing the means by which salvation may be obtained by you and by the chief of sinners. You can scarcely, therefore, think of the crime of which I have been accusing you, without thinking, at the same time, of that blood which has been “shed for the remission of sins,” and of the willingness of God to receive you again into favour, if with genuine penitence you return to him and implore his forgiveness in the name of Christ.

While, my friends, we adore the Providence of God which thus rendered the violence of the Jews subservient to the great purposes of his redeeming grace, and while we admire the skill and the benevolence with which the Apostle suggests this af-

fecting consideration to the minds of his hearers, let it not fail to make a suitable impression on our own hearts. If we have hitherto followed in the footsteps of the Jews by rejecting Christ as our Saviour altogether; or if, professing to be his subjects, we have yet in practice denied his authority to rule over us; or if we have in any way refused that allegiance and submission which it is his right to demand, and our duty to yield;—then are we involved in guilt and danger, and it will be well for us to be sensible of the guilt we have contracted, and of the danger to which we are exposed. But, amidst all our convictions and apprehensions, let us remember that salvation can be obtained only from Him whom we have disobeyed; that we can be washed from our sins in that blood only on which we have been trampling; and that Christ, whom we have done so much to dishonour and to provoke, is at once necessary for our deliverance, and willing to accomplish it. Let us, then, look to his cross with the eye of faith. Let us trust

in that "sacrifice of himself" by which he "takes away the sins of the world." Let us rejoice in the sufficiency of his atonement to expiate all our offences. And let us shew that we feel the greatness of his compassion and his power, by forsaking those iniquities from which he suffered and died to redeem us.

III. This leads us to notice, in the next place, the Apostle's exhortation to repentance and conversion. There is no exhortation more frequently given in Scripture than this; and were our concern to comply with it in any proportion to the earnestness and the emphasis with which it is urged by the sacred writers, human character would present a very different aspect from what it actually exhibits. But, alas! we see thousands, and tens of thousands, living as indifferent to it as if they had never sinned, as if no change were necessary, or as if it could be accomplished at any time with perfect facility. How grossly do such persons deceive themselves! "There is

not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not." To every man, therefore, repentance is necessary from the very nature of the case, and from the express commandment of God. And he who delays this work from day to day, forgets the lesson which every day's observation teaches him respecting the uncertainty of time, and thus puts eternity on the risk of a moment.

Let none of us be so foolish or so perverse, as to neglect an exhortation so pointed, so often repeated, so momentous in its consequences as that of the Apostle, "Repent and be converted." He enforces it here by two great motives, one addressed to our gratitude, and another to our interest. He speaks of the mercy of God in looking with a compassionate eye on us when we offend him, and in providing for us a Saviour whose "blood cleanseth from all sin;" and adds, "repent ye, *therefore*, and be converted." The argument is powerful, and will have effect wherever it is rightly perceived and understood. The divine love

to us, against which we have sinned, and by which we are offered redemption from our sins, has a natural tendency to melt our souls into contrition and sorrow, and to make us cordially hate what must in this connection appear so loathsome and detestable. Let us, therefore, frequently review the divine love as manifested in the cross of Christ. Let us surrender our minds to the influence of such a contemplation. And when we feel our attachments still pointing to forbidden objects, let us think of the exhortation of Paul to the Romans; "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"

The other motive by which the Apostle here enforces his exhortation, is the inseparable connection which subsists between repentance and salvation. "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." What an important and awful consideration! We have transgressed the law of God; we are in

consequence of this, subject to its dreadful and overwhelming penalties ; and he who made that law, and has power to execute it, assures us, in the most solemn manner, that except we repent, we must inevitably perish. Surely, then, if we have any correct ideas of our moral obligations, and any faith at all in what is revealed to us, and any regard to our deliverance from the deepest calamities that can befall us as immortal beings, the exhortation to repentance must come home to our minds with peculiar and irresistible force. And this argument is strengthened by the corresponding consideration, that our repentance will be certainly succeeded by all the blessings of salvation. For this result we have the promise of God, and his promises are all faithful in Christ Jesus. Salvation is not given *on account* of our repentance, but it will indubitably accompany it. If we repent, our sins shall be blotted out. But for this purpose, our repentance must be genuine. It must have its seat in the heart, and it must appear upon the life and con-

duct. Let us be particularly attentive to this point. Let us never rest satisfied with that sort of superficial, or partial, or nominal repentance, which is really equivalent in its effects on our spiritual condition to no repentance at all. While we repent, or feel sincere sorrow for our sins, let us also be “converted,” or turn from our sins. Let us renounce every thing which is contrary to the will of God; and let us henceforth “walk before him in righteousness and holiness all our days.”

IV. Peter divides the blessings accompanying that repentance and conversion which he inculcates, into three branches: “Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out; that times of refreshing,” (I read the passage as, according to my view, it should have been translated,) “may come from the presence of the Lord; and that he may send Jesus Christ, who was before preached unto you.”

1. Let us repent and be converted, *that our sins may be blotted out.* Our sins are

all recorded against us. For all of them we are liable to be brought into judgment. The very least of them is sufficient to condemn us. And unspeakable must be our misery under their accumulated weight. Men too often think lightly of sin. But surely if we consider it in itself, as opposition to the great God of heaven and earth, and in its consequences, as subjecting the sinner to a punishment which stretches into eternity, we cannot be conscious of it, without feeling the most solemn and fearful apprehensions. And in proportion to its dreadful nature and effects, will be the blessing of deliverance from it. When our sins are blotted out or forgiven, we are rescued from the only thing which we have any occasion to fear. We can look inward upon ourselves, for conscience no longer wears the frown, or speaks the language of condemnation. We can look up to God, for that which alone excited his displeasure against us is cancelled by the blood of his own beloved Son. We can look forward to futurity, for all the terrors of the wrath to come have departed at the bidding of di-

vine mercy. The mighty load of evil which pressed upon us on every side is completely and for ever removed. And every feeling of anguish and alarm is supplanted by emotions of joy, when, with penitent and believing hearts, we listen to the voice of the Saviour, who says to us, "Son,—daughter,—be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee."

2. Let us repent, that "*times of refreshing may come to us from the presence of the Lord.*" The immediate presence of the Lord is the residence of all that is good, as well as of all that is great—of all that is compassionate and kind, as well as of all that is holy and just. And they who have access to that inexhaustible source of blessing, cannot fail to receive from it the most abundant supplies of every thing which is requisite to make them happy. But the true penitent, and the true penitent alone, has such access; for in his case, sin is pardoned; and this middle wall of partition between his soul and God being thus broken down, he draws near to God in the

“full assurance of faith,” holds a filial communion with him, and enjoys the most liberal communications of his favour and love. Having found mercy to pardon him, he also obtains “grace to help him in every time of need.” His heart had been long weary and heavy laden under the burden of unrepented and unforgiven guilt; but now there is rest for him, and he reposes in “the peace of God, which passeth understanding.” He has left the rugged, barren, dreary wilderness of sin, and his eye and his soul are refreshed with the “green pastures” and the “still waters” of that new and holy scene on which he has entered. Sin, indeed, still cleaves to him in some measure, and many a painful struggle does he maintain with its temptations; various are the troubles, both spiritual and temporal, which sometimes agitate and sometimes depress his spirit, as he travels along the path to which repentance has at last conducted him; and occasionally he may feel as if there were no profit and no pleasure in serving God. But

all this while he is the object of divine solicitude. A gleam of heavenly light breaks through the darkest hour of his distress, to cheer his heart and to animate his hopes. There is a stream of comfort perpetually flowing into his bosom from the throne of God, to revive and "strengthen the things that were ready to die," to cherish and invigorate his graces, and to fill him with anticipations of yet better times of refreshment, when having entered into "the new heaven and the new earth, wherein dwelleth perfect righteousness," he shall feel no sorrow, but exult in unmingled and imperishable joy.—All this may sound strange and enthusiastic in the ears of those who have not repented of their sins. But it is nevertheless true, consistent with the experience of every real penitent, and distinctly taught in the Gospel of Christ. And I would hold it out as at once a rational and an interesting motive for determining sinners to forsake the evil of their ways, and return to holiness and to God.

3. Let us repent and be converted, that

God “*may send Jesus Christ, who has been preached unto us.*” Jesus Christ has been preached to us as the Saviour. The direct object and tendency of his Gospel is to lead us to repentance and conversion. And if these effects are not produced in us, then have we heard and known in vain of him who has “*come in the name of the Lord to save us.*” But, on the other hand, if, by the blessed influences of the Spirit, the preaching of Christ has come home with efficacy to our hearts, and turned us from sin unto holiness, and from Satan unto God, we have not only the pardon of our sins and seasons of refreshment at present—there is also awaiting us a reversion of joy and glory, when Christ our Redeemer shall come the second time. God will not leave the penitent to mourn for ever in this distant land; he will “*not forsake them who are the work of his own hands,*” and whom he has “*created anew after his own image;*” he will not abandon them to the sleep of death, and the dishonours of the grave. He has a heaven of eternal felicity in reserve for

them. And he will at length send his Son Jesus Christ to gather them from the four corners of the earth, and bring them to his celestial kingdom.—Yes, my friends, if we have experienced that spiritual revolution which is here called repentance and conversion; if we have renounced the service of sin, and devoted ourselves to God through Jesus Christ; our everlasting as well as our present welfare is secure. Christ has gone before to prepare the mansions which he purchased for us on the cross, and when all things are ready, he will “come again to receive us unto himself, that where he is, there we may be also.” O blessed Saviour, let none of us now before thee anticipate that period with indifference: may the prospect which thou hast set before us draw away our hearts from the love, and our feet from the path of sin; and while thou art preparing heaven for us, prepare us also for heaven—so that, whensoever thou shalt call us hence, we may be fit for “entering into the joy of our Lord.”

V. The Apostle tells us, that “the heavens must receive Christ until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets, since the world began.” The word which is here rendered “until,” might, with greater propriety, have been translated “during ;” and then all the difficulty of the passage, as it is found in our version, would have disappeared. In that case the meaning would be, that Christ was to remain in heaven, or while the scheme of the Gospel, which is a scheme of restitution, or restoration, was advancing in its progress towards universal prevalence, and that he was not to make his second and final appearance, until all the facts connected with the progress and triumph of the Gospel upon earth should be fulfilled, according to the predictions of them given by the ancient prophets.

This opens up to us a very wide and most interesting field of meditation. As I have not time for expatiating upon it at large, I shall just mention its leading features.

Our view is directed to what the prophets, under the direction of God, have spoken concerning the gradual prosperity and ultimate glory of the Gospel and church of Christ. The writings of these prophets should therefore be the subject of serious study and devout regard; and, indeed, they cannot fail to obtain distinguished notice from all who feel interested for the honour of the Redeemer, and the salvation and happiness of the world. We are particularly called to consider this most important and delightful fact—that the Gospel, however much it may suffer from wicked and unbelieving men, however limited its spread and its influence may be at present, will sooner or later overcome all opposition, and extend its authority, its consolations, and its hopes, to every corner of the earth. While we rejoice in a prospect so splendid, so glorious, so rich in blessings to mankind, let us be anxious to co-operate with God in realizing it. Let it be our prayer, and our endeavour also,

that the “name of God may be known on the earth, and his saving health among all nations.” Let it be said of none of us, that we have lived and died without making a single exertion for enlarging the kingdom of the Redeemer, and promoting the immortal interests of our fellow men. Jesus Christ has gone into heaven, and will remain in it till his dispensation of grace and power is accomplished upon earth. There, however, he is alive to all its interests. He is exalted to the right hand of the Father, “to give repentance and the remission of sins ;” he “ever liveth to make intercession for us ;” he is invested with supreme and universal authority, that he may employ it for the benefit of his church here below ; and, that work being finished, he “will appear the second time unto them that look for him, without sin unto salvation.” O that we may have believing, and sanctifying, and comforting views of him as he is now employed in heaven, and that when he comes at the last day, we may

“ be found in peace, without spot and blameless,” interested in his righteousness, and adorned with the graces of his Spirit !

LECTURE XIII.

ACTS iii. 22—26.

22. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things, whatsoever he shall say unto you.—23. And it shall come to pass, that every soul which will not hear that Prophet shall be destroyed from among the people.—24. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.—25. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.—26. Unto you first, God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

THIS forms the conclusion of Peter's address to the Jews. The object of his address was to secure their repentance and conversion—to produce in them a sincere sorrow for the treatment they had given to Jesus, and to make them evince this sorrow, by actually accepting of him as the Messiah, and thus turning to God. For this purpose he speaks both to their heart

and their understanding. He speaks to their heart, by enforcing upon them the aggravated injustice and cruelty of which they had been guilty in crucifying the Prince of Life; by warning them of the awful danger to which they had thereby exposed themselves; and by suggesting to them such considerations as might infuse into their minds the hope of divine forgiveness. And he speaks to their understanding, by pointing out the strong and conclusive evidence of Christ's Messiahship, afforded in that very miracle which had brought them together, and filled them with astonishment; and by referring them to the close and striking correspondence which subsisted between the events that had taken place, and the predictions uttered concerning the Messiah by their own prophets. He particularly mentions a prediction uttered by Moses, the first of their prophets; and he seems to mention this particularly, because the prediction itself was not only most remarkably fulfilled, but extremely applicable to his present pur-

pose, in consequence of the threatening annexed to it, and because the person from whom it proceeded was one from whom they had derived the greatest benefits, and for whom they entertained the highest respect.

“ For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, of your brethren, like unto me : him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul which shall not hear that Prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.”

Let us attend for a little to the import and fulfilment of this prophecy.

And here it is unnecessary to trouble ourselves with the opinion of those—chiefly Jews—who have explained this prophecy, as not confined to the Messiah, or to any single individual ; but as applying to all the prophets who successively appeared in the Jewish church. In the *first* place, had this been its meaning, the language would naturally have been not a *prophet*, but

many prophets, or a succession of prophets. In the *second* place, the description here given of the prophet that was to be raised up, does not apply to *all* the prophets that came after Moses, nor indeed to any of them, exactly and fully, excepting Christ. And, in the *third* place, the Apostle here evidently limits the prediction to Christ—for otherwise the introduction of it would be inapposite and inefficient.

Christ had all the ordinary qualifications of a prophet. He foretold future events; and these events came to pass as he had foretold them. He also instructed the people in sacred things, especially testifying against their sins, and exhorting them to repent; and his teaching was with the authority of one who had a divine commission. And he wrought miracles as a proof that God was with him. These were the characters which usually distinguished those who bore the name of prophets. And it was probably from the consideration of all these, that the most of the Jews themselves acknowledged Christ to be one of them;

for it is a fact of great importance, though not much regarded, that the very people who rejected him as the Messiah, were yet convinced, and declared their conviction, that he was a *prophet*; and were perfectly willing to receive him in that capacity, had he pretended to nothing more.

But that which Peter had chiefly in his eye, and what it is of most consequence to attend to, is the resemblance between Christ and Moses intimated in these words “like unto me.” In the leading and characteristic features of a prophet—they, and all the other prophets, were necessarily on a footing; but the prediction implies, that, in the character and circumstances of the particular prophet to whom it has respect, there should be peculiarities distinguishing him from all the other prophets, and assimilating him at the same time to Moses, by whom it was uttered. Now, what were these peculiarities?

1. In the *first* place, Christ, like Moses, was a *Saviour* as well as a prophet. Mo-

ses was employed by Providence to deliver the Israelites "out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage." Christ, in like manner, though in a higher and nobler sense, delivered his people out of the hands of their enemies ; and lived, and died, and rose again, that he might be "for salvation to all the ends of the earth."

2. *Secondly*, Christ, like Moses, was a *Lawgiver*. Moses, according to the instructions which he received from heaven, promulgated both the moral and the ceremonial law : It was through him that God communicated to the people that singular and appropriate system, by which their views and conduct were to be regulated, and by which the way was to be prepared for the coming of him "in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed." In like manner Christ revealed to mankind—"to the Jews first, and also to the Gentiles,"—that scheme of doctrine and of duty through the belief and obedience of which sinners were to be saved. It was *he* who

made known the full dispensation of grace and mercy, that was prefigured and introduced by the dispensation of the law, which had been made known through Moses.

3. *Thirdly*, Christ, like Moses, wrought a great number of miracles. In this respect Moses was superior to all the other Jewish prophets. The situation which he held, the work in which he was engaged, and the perverseness and obstinacy of those with whom he had to do, made it requisite not only that he should perform wonderful works, but that these should be of a striking nature, and that they should be very numerous. Accordingly, from the time that he began the deliverance of the Israelites to the period of his death, the history of his labours and operations is almost a continued series of miracles wrought by his instrumentality. His successors in the prophetic office were not so gifted or so honoured. Scarcely is there a miracle ascribed to any one of them till we come to

Christ himself; and his life is emblazoned with interpositions of divine power. In the course of his ministry, he went about continually, confirming his doctrine every where by signs and wonders, and diverse miracles—and in this way establishing his resemblance to Moses, “in the signs and wonders which the Lord sent *him* to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants, and to all his lands, and in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed in the sight of all Israel.”

4. In the *fourth* place, (and this is the only other mark of resemblance that we shall notice at present) Christ, like Moses, enjoyed unwonted intimacy with God, and received from him extraordinary testimonies of approbation. That Moses was honoured with such privileges and distinctions, is evident from every part of the history of his life. When Aaron and Miriam contended with him for the pre-eminence, “God said, If there be a pro-

phet among you, I the Lord will make myself known to him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches: and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold.”—And at the conclusion of the book of Deuteronomy, a sacred writer has told us, that “there arose not a prophet since in Israel, like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.”—In this important particular, the resemblance of Christ to Moses is obvious and complete. The communion between Christ and God was close, familiar, and endearing. It was the communion of a Father with his only begotten and well-beloved Son. From first to last God singled him out as the object of unqualified complacency and delight. For “he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Such are the leading and most remarkable points of resemblance between Christ and Moses—and they are points of resemblance which serve to identify Jesus of Nazareth as the person spoken of by Moses to the fathers, and to corroborate the evidence afforded by other circumstances of a similar kind, of his having been the Messiah or the great Prophet who should come into the world.

To the prediction there are added both a commandment and a threatening.

1. There is a commandment. “Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.” This deference was due in a certain measure to every one of God’s prophets ; because every one of them delivered his message. But it was due in a peculiar measure to the *great* prophet. It was no ordinary message that he brought from heaven. It was not some particular doctrine that he stated. It was not a few precepts that he was to inculcate. It was not a warning or a deliverance that he was to proclaim to some solitary individual, or

some select nation. He was to speak all the words of eternal life ;—to make known to the world that scheme which God had devised for its salvation ;—to reveal the terms on which alone any sinner could be justified, and accepted, and saved ;—to point out the means by which God had determined to reconcile the guilty to himself, and to prepare them for future happiness ; and the revelation he was thus to make, so momentous in its nature and consequences, was the more worthy of that attention and submission which were demanded for it, as it was the last revelation that the children of men could expect to receive from heaven. The commandment was not intended to be limited in its application to the Jews. Christ came “ a light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as to be the glory of his people Israel.” The evidence of his Messiahship, on which our obligation to obey it is founded, has come home to us with at least as much clearness and force as it possessed with respect to the Jews. And we know that when God testified by a voice from

heaven the entire approbation with which He regarded him, he added this solemn injunction, "Hear ye him." We are commanded to listen to all the instructions which he has delivered; to listen to them with that profound reverence and lively interest which their own intrinsic excellence, their importance to our welfare, and the dignity and authority of their Author, so justly deserve; and, while we receive them with these becoming sentiments, to allow them all that practical influence on our principles and conduct, which they are equally calculated and intended to maintain. Our duty, therefore, as those to whom this commandment is addressed, plainly and unequivocally is to take Christ as our prophet in the full extent of that character. We must beware of resembling those nominal professors, who remain indifferent to the teaching of Jesus, who are ignorant of what he says to them, and take no pains to make themselves acquainted with it. We must read the Scriptures, which contain the word and doctrine of Christ. We must

labour to understand what he has there communicated to us. We must surrender ourselves to his guidance. We must believe what he declares. We must do what he enjoins.

2. But there is here not only a commandment; there is also a threatening connected with it. "And it shall come to pass that every soul which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people." The great and predicted prophet had arrived. He had tabernacled among the Jews. And he had given them numerous and decisive proofs of his divine mission. Yet, instead of receiving him according to the commandment annexed to the prophecy—they rejected him with disdain. They derided his pretensions. They calumniated his doctrine. They persecuted him; and they put him to an ignominious death. Peter charged this directly and emphatically upon their conscience. And having called upon them to repent and to be converted to God in Christ, he enforces the call by reminding them of the ven-

geance denounced against those who refused to submit to the Messiah. But, alas! they despised his warning. A considerable number of individuals, indeed, were so affected by his discourse, and so influenced by the grace of God, that they believed. The Jews, however, as a nation, remained obstinately in impenitence and unbelief. And having resisted the preceptive authority which accompanied the prediction, fulfilled it at the same time by suffering the dreadful fate which it denounced against their disobedience. You know, my friends, the awful and unexampled vengeance that God inflicted on that rebellious people, on account of their treatment of the Messiah. It is recorded for our warning. We are under the same obligations that they were to receive him and submit to him. If we imitate their conduct, we must expect their fate. Nay, we become doubly guilty; since, in the punishment to which they were doomed, and in the circumstances in which they are placed at this day, we have at once a warning which was not given to

them, and an additional evidence of the Messiahship of Jesus. Let us profit by this dispensation. Let none of us "refuse him that speaketh from heaven." Let us rather welcome him, since he "comes in the name of the Lord," and brings us the glad tidings of salvation. And among the various powerful motives which should constrain us to give him this cordial reception, let us never forget the words of this prophecy, which speak terror to all who will not repent and believe the Gospel. Let us recollect, that though public and national judgments may not be executed upon us—though the number of those who believe may induce the Almighty to spare a crooked and perverse generation, yet that each one of us must at last render an account of himself to God; and then it shall come to pass, that whosoever has rejected the Saviour upon earth shall be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power."

But Peter informed his audience, that predictions respecting the Messiah were

not peculiar to Moses. The other prophets of their church, with whose writings they professed to be conversant, and for whom they avowed a becoming respect, had in one way or another pointed to the same great object. “Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.” Samuel is here put at the head of the prophets who succeeded Moses for several reasons. From the time of Moses to that of Samuel, prophecy was of very rare occurrence; for, as we read (1 Sam. iii. 1.) “the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision.” Besides, Samuel was the first after Moses whose prophecy was committed to writing, and thus recorded for the future benefit of the people. It was he by whom the schools of the prophets were first established and constituted. And in his writings are contained some pointed and express predictions of the Messiah. Those also who followed him in the prophetical office, as many of them at least

as spoke at any length of the future arrangements and dispensations of divine wisdom, uttered predictions, some of them more clear, and some of them more obscure, concerning the times of refreshment and of grace which *they* were now so happy as to witness.

Now, says Peter, “Ye are the children of the prophets.” The prophets were frequently styled *Fathers*, and, of course, those who were taught by them, were denominated their *children*. The Jews to whom Peter spoke, were the children of the prophets, in as much as they belonged to that church for whose benefit more immediately the prophetic office was instituted. They were instructed by the prophets in the subject of religion. They had received from them distinct notices of the Messiah. Such information on this point had been conveyed to them as was sufficient to convince them that Jesus whom they had crucified was He who “should come to redeem Israel.” And, consequently, if they persisted in rejecting him, they were left without excuse; they voluntarily

became the victims of unfounded prejudice; they shewed that their moral dispositions were ungodly and perverse; and therefore they could only expect to perish in their sins.

The Apostle adds, “and of the covenant which God made with our Fathers, saying unto Abraham, and in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.” The Jews were “children of the covenant”—that is, they were descendants of Abraham, with whom God made the covenant, of which the leading promise was, that one of his posterity, according to the flesh, should be the Redeemer of the world; and from the connection in which this statement is introduced, he evidently means to intimate, not merely that unless they received this Redeemer, the promise would be altogether useless to them, but that they were under peculiar obligations to receive him, arising from the peculiar privileges which they derived from being of the “stock of Abraham,” and by necessary inference, if they neglected and disregarded these, their

guilt and their condemnation would be proportionally increased.

We, my friends, are not the children of the prophets, and of the covenant, in precisely the same sense in which the Jews were; but we are so in such a sense, and to such an extent, as should make us startle at the idea of refusing to accept of Christ. The prophets have written for *our* instruction also; and the fulfilment of their predictions is such, as to render infidelity on our part an unpardonable offence against the wisdom and authority of God. The covenant contains a promise that extends to us. Its accomplishment was to be effected by a lineal descendant of Abraham; but as to its benevolent object, it embraces the moral and eternal interests of all the kindreds of the earth; and though in outward and natural estate we be Gentiles,—“aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise,”—yet we are not only invited, but it is absolutely necessary that we come within the spiritual pale of this covenant,—that we be

the children of the patriarch, with whom it was originally made, by faith,—that we rest upon the promise which it so graciously unfolds,—that we believe in him from whom it derives all its meaning, its efficacy, and its glory. Let us, then, accept of the Saviour, and seek for justification and eternal life through him; that thus the prophets may not rise up in judgment against us to condemn us, and that being “of faith, we may be blessed with faithful Abraham.”

There is yet another consideration which Peter submits to his hearers. He tells them, that an honourable distinction was conferred upon them—the first offer of the Saviour was given to them. “Unto you, *first*, God having raised up his Son Jesus,” that is, from the loins of the patriarch Abraham, “sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquity.” Doubtless God had wise purposes to serve by this arrangement; and the Gospel was preached primarily to the Jews, for this among other reasons, that while it

took away one ground of offence from that highly favoured people, it allowed Christianity to go with additional evidence among the Gentiles. Still, however, it was a privilege of which they ought to have been sensible, and for which they ought to have been grateful. It seems to be mentioned by Peter with the view of producing that effect. But the argument failed. With few exceptions comparatively, the Jews continued obstinate in their rejection of the Messiah. Peter, and his fellow-labourers in the ministry, reasoned with them, pleaded with them, remonstrated with them,—but in vain. And at length, wearied out with their “contradictions, and their blasphemies,” Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken unto you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo! we turn to the Gentiles; for so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldst be for salvation to the

ends of the earth." "And when the Gentiles heard this they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord."

Yes, my friends, we have good reason, like these Gentiles of old, "to be glad." Actuated by Christian compassion, we must deeply regret that the Jews acted such a criminal and destructive part; we must feel sorrow to see them wrapped up in spiritual delusion even to this day; and it must be our earnest prayer, that the veil may speedily be removed from their eyes and their hearts. At the same time, it is for us abundant cause of thankfulness and joy, that, "through their fall, salvation is come unto the Gentiles." O, that we may be enabled to glorify the word of that salvation, by embracing, and believing, and obeying it! The fate of the Jews should make us tremble to think of neglecting it on any account, or in any measure. And while we are determined, by this awful warning, to "lay hold on the hope set before us" in the Gospel, let us do so willingly and cordially, in consideration of all the

mercy that is displayed, and of all the happiness that is promised, in the declaration before us—God has “sent his Son Jesus to bless us.”

In the blessing of Christ is implied every thing that is requisite to make us happy; for “in Christ it hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell.” There is not a danger which he cannot avert, nor a want which he cannot supply, nor a sorrow which he cannot heal. There is not an honour which he cannot confer, nor a joy which he cannot impart, nor a hope which he cannot inspire. All the comforts of time, and all the glories of eternity, are at his disposal. He is able to bestow them, and his grace is commensurate with his power. Nor are we left to contemplate Christ as merely possessed of this ability and this willingness to make us happy; we are led to contemplate him as one who has been sent, who has actually come, for the very purpose of exercising these attributes, and giving them effect. He came, commissioned by that God whose law we had trans-

gressed, and to whose displeasure we were exposed. He came, invested with those qualifications that were suitable to the accomplishment of that redeeming work which he had undertaken to perform. He came, diligently doing, and patiently enduring all that the Father had appointed; that, “being made perfect, he might become the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him.” He came, offering his salvation to the chief of sinners,—beseeching them to accept of it,—bestowing it upon them in all its freedom, and in all its fulness. And it is in the experience of thousands that are “living by the faith of the Son of God,” and more especially in the experience of that multitude around the throne, whose faith has been turned into vision, that they who are blessed of Christ are blessed indeed,—beyond the power of human language to express, and beyond the power of unbelieving men to conceive.

But let not the obstinate and impenitent sinner presume to think, that, in the midst of his obstinacy and impenitence, he can

possibly enjoy the benediction of Christ. Christ, indeed, is the Saviour of sinners. This is the light in which he is held forth in the Gospel: this is the very essence, the perfection, and the glory of his Mediatorial character. It is in the capacity of sinners that we are to apply to him, because it is in this capacity that *we* absolutely need *him*, and that *he* primarily regards *us*. If we do not apply to him till we be righteous, we offer him a high affront; for this would proceed on the supposition, that he is not necessary to a most important part of our spiritual deliverance, or that he could not accomplish it. If we do not apply to him till we be righteous, our application can never take place at all; for how shall we become personally righteous, except through the sanctifying influences of his blood and Spirit? If we do not apply to him till we be righteous, we overturn the whole scheme of the Gospel; we defeat one of its great objects; we “reject the counsel of God against ourselves.” At the same time let us never forget, that Christ

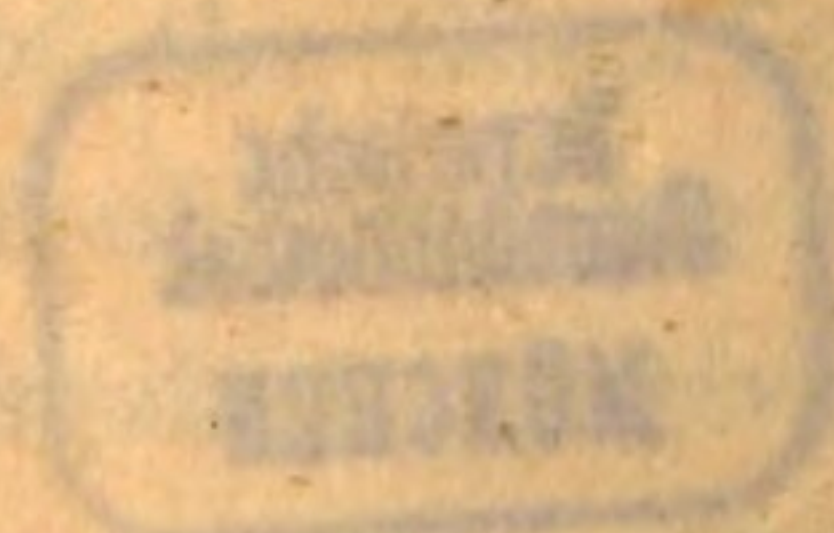
was “sent to bless us, in turning away every one of us from his iniquities.” Let us recollect, that one grand and essential end of his mission is to sanctify us. His teaching, his example, his death, his intercession, and his administration, all conspire to produce in us conformity to the divine will. The happiness which he imparts is indissolubly connected with the holiness which he requires, both as to this world, and that which is to come. Let it be our study, therefore, while we name his sacred name, and seek for an interest in his favour, to “depart from all iniquity,” and to “abound in those works of righteousness which are by him to the glory and the praise of God.” Amen.

END OF VOLUME FIRST.



EDINBURGH:
Printed by A. Balfour.

was sent to place us, in turning away from
 by one of us from the indignity. The
 recollected, that one grand and essential
 of his mission is to sanctify us. His
 ing his example, his death, his resurrection,
 and his ascension, all conspire to pro-
 duce in us conformity to the divine will.
 The happiness which he intends is inde-
 libly connected with the holiness which he
 requires, both as to this world, and that
 which is to come. Let it be our study
 therefore, while we name his sacred name,
 and seek for an interest in his blood, to
 "depart from all iniquity," and to "abound
 in those works of righteousness which are
 for him to the glory and the praise of God."



ms. D. 2. 11
 175 n

சென் - சென்
Max
சென். சென்

